

Argus
Musings

*This journal
belongs
to*

*of
Northwestern State
University,
Natchitoches, LA.*

Argus

art & literary magazine 2005



Musings

Dear Reader,

When the SGA Media Board elections came around last year, I had second thoughts about running for editor again. The main question running through my head was, "How am I going to beat this edition of *Argus*?" With the first publication I'd ever managed turning out even better than I had expected, I had reservations about trying to outdo myself. However, one thing I knew needed work was the *Argus* staff. Because my first year was spent running around trying to learn the ropes without an experienced staff, I couldn't focus my energies on building something to leave behind for another editor. Most of the work was put on just a few shoulders: Dan Grissom designed the magazine by himself, and a few others and I edited the content. After being elected editor for a second year, I focused my main goal on building a staff. I decided that leaving talent behind for *Argus*, not just another book, would be my mark as editor.

editor's note

What you are holding in your hands now, I am proud to say, was created out of the determined, collaborative efforts of many talented staff members. Though my staff page did not increase from last year, I can honestly say that everyone has worked together in attending to all aspects of *Argus*, from editing the content to designing the magazine to publicizing and distributing the magazines. I hope that every staff member and contributor's experience was positive and educational—we are still students, after all, and we are here to learn.

So, read this *journal* however you may wish—front to back, back to front, or not at all—but know how much energy has gone into every small detail and how many hands have passed over these pages before they have reached you. This journal, "Musings," is not meant to be just a personal record of people's lives, but now that it has been printed and distributed, it is including you in its creative works. Enjoy.

I'd like to thank Dr. Pritts and Dr. Colavito for helping us with theme. Nate and I brainstormed about the times during which people write—morning, noon, and night, and Dr. C gave us the language for those times. Dr. Kane, it has been a great pleasure to work with you once again; your determination with the budget this year kept me inspired as an editor. Without your diligence with the whole magazine, we would have ended up with a lesser quality magazine. Thank you, Elaine Broussard, for double-checking the design with a journalism eye; from one editor to another, I wish you luck in the future. Thanks especially to each and every member of my staff. You have all taught me so much, though you may not know. I hope I proved to be what each of you needed in an editor.

Best Wishes,



Angelin L. Adams
Editor-in-Chief

We went a different route with *Argus* this year, as you may realize. We tried to get the journal back to what it was intended to be—not a pirated piece of media or a prodigal shock to the faculty of Northwestern, but instead something altogether reflective and tasteful.

*about the
design*

“Musings,” as a philological term, has its origins in Greece where the Muses were the goddesses of creativity and inspiration. Today, we consider this term as a way to explain shared ideas, no matter how trivial or deep, and no matter what the medium. Our staff felt it was the most appropriate title for all the collected works contained here, and we believe you will agree as you experience these works over and over again.

Each of the three sections, *Aubade* (a poem about the morning), *Interlude* (a pause in the movement of the day), and *Nocturne* (a musical composition for the night) was designed to have a less formal appeal, evoking the initial thoughts and feelings that our contributors had when inspiration first struck. To help capture this process, we chose some of the pieces to be displayed in handwritten form, but decided that all of the contributors needed to authenticate their work with their signatures. In essence, the overall layout was designed as a tribute to its most simplistic form—the personal journal. We attempted to maintain the romantic and private appeal of the journal/notebook where sketches and works are put together while remaining both contemporary and fluid. The moods and perceived meanings of the pieces were also grouped together to show the process of thought at each stage of the day and artistic process. Morning is both ruffled and refreshing as we collect our dreams and first ideas, Noon is more comfortable as creativity begins to really ignite, and Night is a time of reflection, experimentation, and final thoughts. Overall, you are given the privilege to feel as if you have picked up the portfolio of the most gifted artists at Northwestern. Some things are so personal that you may never fully catch their meanings. Perhaps you will be inspired to create your own.

While *Argus* was diligently cared for, this work could not have been done without the creativity of my own Muses:

Angelina Adams	-for being you, and not believing everything you hear
Kimberly Brammer	-for letting me vent
Amber Istre	-for reservation while I was vocal
Dena Leonard	-for getting the vision immediately

On a personal note, I would like to thank a couple of people for their contributions:

Mary Brocato	-for taking a chance on an unknown kid
Jude	-for taking a sad song and making it better

Randall S. Frederick

Randall S. Frederick
Layout Coordinator



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Northwestern State University.

With such an increasing interest in *Argus* on campus, this publication could not have been possible without the help of many hands. Thanks to everyone who supports our only art and literary magazine at NSU. Ask any student published in this magazine how it feels to be recognized campus-wide, and you will understand the importance of such a publication.

Thank you, Dr. Kane, for struggling with the budget so that we could maintain the quality of our magazine. Your guidance and perseverance as an advisor over the past three years have improved the reputation of *Argus* and elevated its status to a national level.

Many thanks to our contributors, published or not. We hope that we have served you well as editors and designers. Without all of your submissions, of course, this magazine and staff would lack purpose. Keep the entries coming!

We would also like to thank our judges for their superior critiques of the entries. We have always kept our standards high in selecting our judges and have never been disappointed in the selections for the contest winners. We appreciate the time all of you have put into choosing the winners.

acknowledgments

Without the knowledge of the ins and outs of the budget and administrative work, this magazine could not be possible at all. Ms. Bobby and Ms. Peggy, you two truly keep the Language and Communication Department together. Thank you for your continued support of *Argus*.

Thank you, Cathy Trichel of Business Affairs, for helping with budget concerns.

Thank you, Gary Hardamon, for photographing all of the selected pieces for layout. Without your help, we could not achieve the quality of our showcased art and photography. Your support from year to year does not go unnoticed.

We would also like to thank Dr. Rocky Colavito for helping to name this particular edition and the three sections within the magazine. Your insight and encouragement as a department head have been greatly appreciated; good luck in your future endeavors as an educator.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the administration of NSU and the professors of the Department of Language and Communication, the Department of Journalism, the Scholars' College, and all supporters of *Argus*.

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contest winners

Creative Nonfiction

- 1st - "The Powers that Be"
Amy Mensah
2nd - "Breaking Ida"
Charlotte Spradling
3rd - "Historical Tales of
the Voodoo Queen"
Amanda Robinson

Poetry

- 1st - "When I Asked You"
Kyle Shirley
2nd - "49"
Danny Jackson
3rd - "Elle and Vogue"
Ashley Pierce
tie "If When Love Come"
Thomas Parrie

Photography

- 1st - "Silhouettes"
Cheryl Thompson
2nd - "letdown"
Cheryl Thompson
3rd - "Snacktime"
Leslie Westbrook

Fiction

- 1st - "Hans Von Hoppenheim"
Dena Leonard
2nd - "Melodies of the Magic Frog"
Charlotte Spradling
3rd - "Light Like Hope"
Nicole Gordy

Art

- 1st - "Unkilted" (sculpture)
Elliot Westphal
2nd - "Refuge"
Shawna Atkins
3rd - "Siren"
Miguel Bobadilla

A sepia-toned photograph of a cup of coffee on a white napkin, a spiral-bound notebook, and a pen. The cup is on the left, the notebook is on the right, and the pen is resting on the notebook. The word "Aubade" is written in a cursive font at the top left.

Aubade

"Write only what you love, and love what you write. The key word is love. You have to get up in the morning and write something you love, something to live for."

-Ray Bradbury

Angus

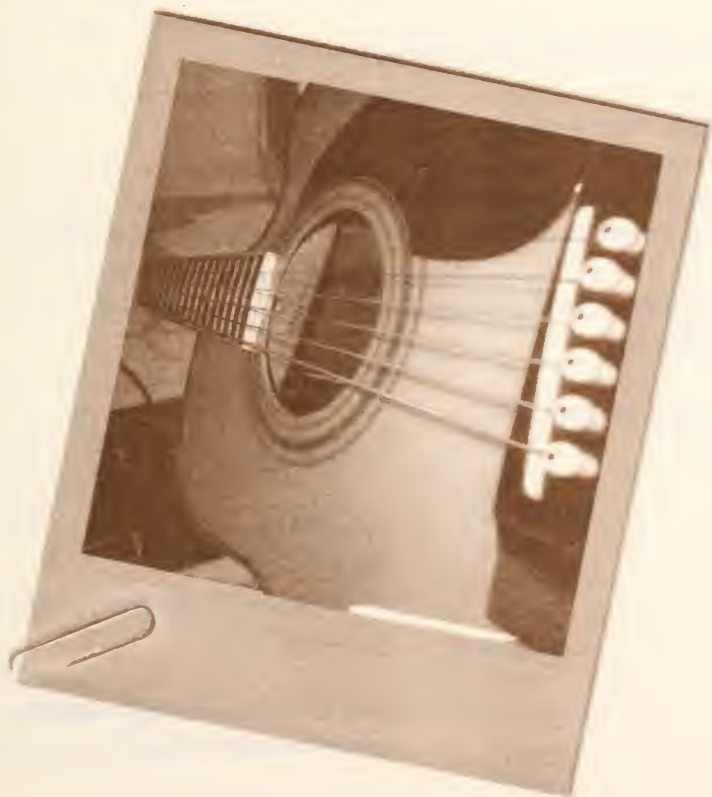
Strings

Teri Murphy

Strings are the most amazing things, because strings can do a multitude of things, especially if you have a multitude of strings. Strings can be used to sew bigger clothes. They can be cut, stretched, rolled, and tied into a knot. Strings hold things together; they can be long or short, and if you were falling, you would hope that you would have at least one to hold on to. Unlike a camel, strings can fit through the eye of a needle. A ball of string can be a wonderful toy for a cat, but once I had to pull a single string of a Christmas icicle from a kitten's mouth. Seems he had swallowed the whole darn thing, except for one little silver slip hanging out of his mouth. Spiders are the kings of strings. They can hang by a string and not mind at all. They can weave a strong web of strings that hold many heavy and wonderful things to eat, but not until they have wrapped their meal in a cocoon built of string. So, strings can even keep things fresh. Most people might think spiders are scary things, but not as scary as an invisible string. Strings are attached to everything: purses, people, and monetary gain. So, strings are made to hold onto things. If two people get married, they are said to have tied the knot. What a terrible thing to do to a string! Two free strings in an awful mess. They say nothing comes without strings, even the most unexpected

things, like friends and favors and wedding rings. They will all try to tell you that "there are no strings attached," but there are! Luckily, I haven't been strung along in a long time. Strings can be used for nobler things; they can allow a kite to fly and play a child a lullaby. In fact, orchestras have a whole section of strings, which they slide, pluck, and bow to make beautiful music. Strings are expected to do so many significant things, and still they are abused. Bass players are known to slap and pop their strings and force strings to keep rhythm. As a result, strings have to be changed often, as they become grimy, rusty things that you can no longer stand to play with. Then, they go straight to the trash. Some people save their strings in case they break one, but they never sound as good. Strings can be hand-wound, because strings have another string wound around them to make them even larger and have a bigger, deeper sound. Strings must be stretched if they are expected to stay in tune. I never change strings without the sharp ends pricking my hands and making my fingers bleed. Strings have to be continually tuned to stay in pitch because, if not, the music can render an awful stench to one's ears. Strings are a pain in the ass to put on and to take off. Even so, I take great care of my strings. I wipe them down after I

am finished playing them, and when I get home, I clean them again with alcohol to make sure they stay fresh. I even put them away in a case to protect them from humidity. I like Ernie Ball and Rotosound strings, and they are the only strings that I can't live without, except maybe those earlier mentioned wedding strings. These strings are said to have great tone and long life. Who would have ever thought there was life in a string? I have to buy so many strings and hate to break one for it ruins all the others. My strings are the best so far, because they make such wonderful sounds on my guitar.

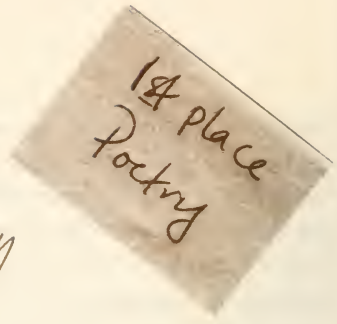


Angus

when i asked you

when i asked you,
"what lies do you believe?"

Kyle Shirley



i wasn't expecting a full color catalogue
mailed the same day,
bursting out flaking metal seams
that creaked outloud and
in their creaking said,

"oh, my love, where do we begin?"

i didn't realize that items such as
marionette dreams
and
retroactive peace
and
misguided self-indulgent glory-seeking destitution

were right on tap for this
bottomless glass
i've been wearing like a press pass
on a well-intentioned mock-up for this dress-down dazzle-show.

we're right there for display.
we're piling up...

"hell, i never ordered this,"
and then,

for that moment...

i wasn't sure.

i couldn't remember
my slippery drapes
my iced-down sheets
my razor foil

that i'd forged from the lapses
of reasons that i used to shine myself up on the

saturday nights
when the moon begs full.

One Word

Michael James Hoffert

Together—what an awful word. To—get—her.
 Maybe that is why I am not with someone!—
 I don't want to "get" someone. I want to be gotten.
 I want someone to want me; possessed.
 Particles, aspects of the word I like.

To, a preposition of action—transformations,
 Boundaries, crossings, movement.
 To a place, To be.
 This word harms me; this word challenges.

Get, an action verb yet still weak in nature.
Get—how many other words are better—
Possess, own, grasp, acquire—
 So many that my mind can barely put down and
 (Re)member the words/verbs eluding my grasp.

Her, a pronoun—an interesting one
 That I have no interest in,
 Almost nothing to do with what I want.
 However, I still like the word.
She's/Hers—belonging, possession.

This word, *together*, harms me;
 Haunts me.
 Alone not together—
 That is the word that describes me.

Dying Being Born

111 B

On November 19, 1983 I almost died being born. My mother's pregnancy was a nine-month party, in which she felt healthier than ever, illuminated by an expectant glow and energized by late night cravings for chili dogs and Orange Juliuses. But when complications occurred during birth, she was faced with inscrutable pain and terrifying mortality. I'm surprised we have such a close relationship now, considering that we almost killed each other upon first meeting.

Mom didn't alter her life much for my benefit during the last week of her pregnancy. While another woman might have slowed down or planned her inevitable hospital stay for the birth of her first child, Mom cooked, cleaned, attended luncheons, and ran errands. After all, despite her plump appearance, the doctors told the blushing twenty-six-year old: "You're not even dilated. That baby's not coming out for another two weeks." But as she and my father watched *Dallas* on a Friday night, I argued otherwise.

At 9:00 p.m. her belly assumed a rigidity she couldn't distinguish. These thirty-second intervals of stiffness weren't painful—not yet at least—so my eventual parents kept watching TV. Dad left a message with her absent doctor, just in case. Under the same precautionary measures, Mom took a shower, blow-dried her

silky black hair, and applied makeup. These acts were the first examples of the maternal intuition that would serve her well over the next twenty years: she somehow knew she would be in the hospital within hours. And sure enough, her water broke at two o'clock. By that time the contractions, the sensations that began as belly tautness, were a lingering, unendurable pressure in her back and lower body.

Mom had no desire to give birth naturally: "I'm not one of these Lamaze types of people," she informs me now. "Give me the drugs. I don't want to see it, and I don't want to nurse it." But by the time she arrived at the hospital and was administered to, it was almost too late for an epidural since she was unknowingly dilated eight centimeters. This was the first mistake of Mom's obstetrician, Dr. Wry, who arrived just in time to see my head penetrate the birth canal. Wry was tall and slender, marked by wispy brown hair and bulky eyeglasses, and my parents had hired him almost solely on his charm. But as the term wore on—and especially later that night—Mom and Dad began to doubt his competency. For example, I was conceived before the era of the home pregnancy test, and when Mom found out from Wry that she was pregnant, she became worried about the drinking she had done the night

before. His customarily deadpan response was: "You know how many babies were conceived in a drunken stupor? All four of mine were." If I were in possession of this evidence, I wouldn't have supported his shady practice; but, unfortunately, I was not able to sign off on such things.

It seemed to the good doctor as if the chain of events was progressing too fast. If I continued in my pushing and refused to wait for a controlled introduction to the world, I would curse myself with a misshapen head. The head would be able to be massaged down to an average curvature eventually; but Mom, under the influence of fluctuating hormones and the confusing effects of the epidural, began her now-familiar act of freaking out. "Is there any way you can slow it down?" she asked, "I don't want a conehead."

Dr. Wry smiled ironically: "Mrs. Bowes, most people wouldn't want to *slow down* labor. I'm going to catch an hour of sleep."

In the meantime, since this was also before ultrasounds were widespread, the nurses hooked Mom and me to various monitors to determine our statuses. Not long after they did this, my monitor began to blare with quick, panicked beeps. I had somehow managed, the nurses calmly informed Mom, to wrap the umbilical cord around my throat. Slowly, possibly out of spite for this Dr. Wry, I was strangling myself with the tube that was supposed to nourish me. This impediment is referred to as *nuchal loops*, and whether I was subcon-

sciously suicidal or very hungry, I wasn't breathing.

Dr. Wry returned immediately, or as immediately as someone like Dr. Wry can return, and explained the situation to Mom, presenting her options. Adjusting his glasses, he stammered: "Okay, here's the deal. Things are going too fast. If we wait too long, we're going to need to do an emergency C-section, which is more complicated. Plus, the baby can't breathe. But if we take him out now...you know, conehead."

"You're the doctor," Mom blurted out. "You tell me. I certainly don't want to jeopardize my baby's life." She had a point.

"You decide," he insisted.

"Do—get him out." In retrospect, this doesn't seem like a choice at all. What was Wry thinking?

As if on cue, Dad, who was suited up in the customary pale green scrubs, wobbling in the corner, mumbled, "I think I need some juice," and fainted.

"Get him out of here. I can't deal with him right now," Dr. Wry commanded.

Because Mom didn't want to watch Wry jack-o-lantern her stomach, the nurses hung a sheet to keep her from seeing the finer points of the operation. Consequently, when I finally exited the womb, from her angle, Mom had trouble seeing me but was worried about a few aspects of my health. For one thing, I wasn't crying; but perhaps more critically, I was blue. As she called out: "Is it a boy? Is he okay? What's going on? Is he okay?" The staff ignored her for what Mom

says seemed like an eternity. After some tests on me, Wry turned back to Mom, and she heard a morbid suction coming from his direction. When newborns are in distress, they sometimes produce *meconium*, a buildup of mucus and cellular debris that mixes in with the amniotic fluid. Or, to avoid medical terminology, they take a dump in the mother. Not only is this action disgusting (and quite disrespectful, I shamefully add), it's dangerous for both parties. The bowel movement can easily infect the mother and even suffocate the offspring. But if the infant doesn't die, if he inhales too much of the stool, he can still collapse a lung or develop Meconium Aspiration Syndrome, a form of autism. What Dr. Wry was doing was vacuuming Mom's innards with an aspirator. As he anti-climactically told her I was a boy, she heard: "Neo-Natologist to delivery room one. Stat." Tragically, before this specialist could arrive, I perished.

Just kidding. I lived. Triumphantly, resiliently, like a phoenix rising from his ashes, I suddenly began to cry and breathe after some suction and revival. I was a miniature version of the robust and sexy man you see before you. The only difference, as photographs from that day attest, is that I looked vaguely Asian.

But Mom's experience after the birth was not as affirming as mine. The medical staff had left quickly, and my revived dad followed me to the ICU to track my recovery. Mom had been left in her room all alone. As chills and teeth-chattering set in (side effects of

the drugs), dwarfed by the deluxe suite my father's incredibly inclusive insurance had provided, still in pain and exhausted from the delivery, Mom began to cry. Her hormones were in disarray, and it's easy to blame the tears on that, or the fact that she still hadn't really seen me; but I think the depression was more complicated than simple baby blues. In the coming months, she would grow very sick with infections and fevers of over 105 degrees. She would often stay at her mother's house because my dad couldn't stand the fact that I would only sleep for fifteen minutes at a time.

Three years later, she would give birth to my brother; eight years after that she would divorce Dad. But the emotion that seized Mom early that November morning was one of contradictory, baffling dread. Dread of the sinister suspicion that life would never become any more heroic than what she had just done, that—although she wasn't even thirty—her best days were over. Staring at a pre-emptive Christmas tree in an empty room with everyone gone, with the eight pound, nine-ounce product of all that labor having just crapped in her, Mom felt more transcendently alone than ever. The suspicion that this would be the best moment of her life was paradoxically sad, but also empowering, I think. Even though it was painful and chilling and stressful, Mom had just accomplished the most sacrificial, committed, and sacred act she ever would, that anyone ever could: she had created life. She had given a voice to the empty room and hope to a world that had a little less before.

2nd place
Poetry

49

David J. Farn

#49

please don't misunderstand my
shortness of breath or the
watering of my eyes
appearances and actions can be
plausible conditions.

while it is true that
i have never been more sad
than at this moment
the reasons have eluded you.
my only regrets are
that i took the time to sleep
and i took the time to blink
and i took the time to breathe
when i could have been shaking
circus tigers from your heart
and i should have been sucking
bits of coral from your lungs.

Angels

Insatiate TishFelts

Insatiate

The vee calls to me at an
octave I've never heard before —
I am the force of all that is
erect in the world, the weight
of heaven entering our lower
depths — to feel the thrust of
the moment, the immediacy of
skin crashing into skin; the
perfect fit of lock and vessel.

Metamorphosis

Amanda Robinson

I am without form. An Amoeba,
Single-celled,
Invisible to the naked eye,
With jelly arms reaching out and through constantly
Absorbing everything around me, taking it in.
Opening slowly like an abused child,
Peeking around a corner far away from home,
Then recoiling from the glance of a stranger.
Alone, but comfortably so.
Free living and flowing.
Then forced to move, change
Accept an alternate world, dimension.
From the petri dish, inserted with wings of DNA,
transformed and given flight.
Ripped from water,
Dragged across land,
Thrown in the nest, and then pushed out.
Fly or die they say, but
Flying comes so easy
when you are without form.

Angels

Expenses A. Pierce

Expenses

Tracy Segura frames

French

15 dollars and 50 cents at the flea market

Down from our house.

They kept my secret.

Plums on my eyes--

They turned to mush behind those lenses,

Wine and black to mustard green

Before I could bear to take them off.

For years I found him flawless

Even after the night

He found my phone list

And taught me how to erase the past.

That gash did not heal

For twelve days

So my polka dot scarf

Was the topic of conversation

you are Ophelia, they said.

His words are white hot and hollow

But I didn't listen

I kept my faith

I kept my penance

Bumps of bone on broken skin.

Lately I've been buying
far too many accessories.

Untitled

Elvis + Hill

I will not be overlooked
by you.
As your sight is dim,
I see through you.
Yet so slight you skimmed
what is my hue.
In fact,
you only detect
indignant images
I reflect:
The 'tudes
and views
of your
paint-by-number
colored world—
never a twist or turn
you didn't suspect.
Rationalize it all,
opinionated circumspect.

Since I reside
within your sphere,
I crave to tell,
my dear,
that there is a
peach in your
cherry pie of a world.
The milk you have poured
has already curdled.

For I am taking
a stand in defiance of
a fruitless plan
to bleed what has already
been bled,
to make straight the hairs
of my head,
ones better left curled.

Stop ruthlessly adorning;
it's just snipping away
at my spirit.
I'm no longer conforming
to perfect your play;
in hell I will fit in.
So take time to care—
don't care to take
nor to sorrow,
rest assured.
The indulgent crack I might make
be gladly filled
tomorrow.

Choices Victoria Knick Jenkins

Rachel Worthington stared absently out of the windows of her family's two-story brick ranch house. The summer sun blazed hotter than the Fourth of July even though it was near the middle of October. Slouching angrily on the sofa, she silently cursed herself for having been caught drinking the night before. It *was* only a few drinks after all, certainly not enough to warrant being grounded for a whole month.

Glancing sideways at her mother, who was vacuuming for the third time that day, she rolled her eyes and muttered something unintelligible under her breath as she turned back to the windows.

"Get off that couch and help me clean up this house!" shouted Mamma, snapping Rachel out of her daydream. Still remaining obstinately immobile on the couch, Rachel stared intently at her mother as she whisked around the room with a can of Pledge and a rag, attacking the dust on the furniture as if it were her most bitter enemy.

Caroline Worthington was almost as beautiful at thirty-two as she had been in high school. A former homecoming queen and dance team captain, she had been elected one of the most beautiful girls at her small Catholic high school.

"How can a woman who is that pretty spend her entire life cleaning and cooking when she could have been anything she wanted?" thought Rachel to herself.

Rising slowly from the couch, she cautiously approached her mother

and tapped her softly on the shoulder.

"What do you want, Rachel?" asked Caroline impatiently. "Can't you see I'm busy right now?"

"Mom, can we talk?" Meeting her daughter's eyes, Caroline set down her cleaning supplies and followed Rachel to the kitchen table. It had been several months since the two had actually had a civilized conversation, and the thought of having a heart-to-heart talk gave Rachel the courage she needed to make the first step.

"Mom," Rachel said slowly, "I think I made a big mistake last night."

* * *

Johnny Thompson pulled his vintage red Mustang to a screeching halt in the school parking lot. Jumping over the driver's door in his usual cool fashion, he was the absolute picture of perfection.

Every girl at St. Ann's High School wanted Johnny. Rachel was no exception.

Pulling into the parking lot right after Johnny, she secretly watched as he grabbed his books and sauntered casually towards the entrance of the school.

Rachel was one of the prettiest and most popular girls at her school. Dressed in her cheerleading uniform with her long, blonde hair in a neat ponytail, she was envied by all of the girls, and desired by all of the boys.

Just seeing Johnny made her feel weak in the knees and all funny inside, almost like she would be sick. Waiting in her car until Johnny had entered the building, Rachel got out

of her blue Honda Accord and made her way inside.

No sooner had she stepped foot inside the door, than he was there right in front of her looking better than he had looked only a few minutes before. "Hey girl, what's up?" he asked smoothly.

"Oh, not much here. How about you?"

"You're lookin' fine today. When ya gonna let me take you out?"

Rachel's heart raced as she searched for the right words to say. Struggling to cover her shakiness, she laughed girlishly and said, "I don't know."

"How about tonight after the game?"

"Sure," she said, trying not to sound too excited.

"Great," he said. "Meet me in the stadium parking lot after the game."

The rest of the day went by in a blur. News of the date had spread around the school like wildfire. Before she could even get to her first period class, all of her friends already knew. They congratulated her to her face and talked about her behind her back. She didn't care though; she had waited for this day for as long as she could remember.

* * *

Rachel stood nervously outside the football stadium after the game talking to her friend Karen. Karen was one of the few friends that she considered trustworthy.

"You be careful with him. He likes to take things fast," Karen said.

"I will. You know me," said Rachel, rather unconvincingly.

Johnny pulled up a few minutes later, rolled down the window, and said, "Get in, gorgeous." With one last glance at Karen, Rachel got in, and the two sped away.

"I have my brother's ID, so we can stop and get some beer right up

here," said Johnny. "You drink, don't you?"

Not wanting to sound immature, Rachel said quickly, "Oh yeah, of course I drink."

While it was true that Rachel had had a few drinks before, for some reason, this time seemed different. Her mother's words kept popping into her head no matter how hard she tried to make them go away. "Drinking makes you do things that you normally wouldn't do."

Ignoring the nagging voice of her mother, Rachel eagerly accepted the beer that Johnny pushed towards her. Cranking up the music, Johnny drove towards the country, laughing and talking so that Rachel felt more and more comfortable by the minute. By the time the car stopped, Rachel had downed four beers. Johnny's voice when he spoke sounded as if it were coming from far away. "Hey, Babe. You know I've always wanted to get with you."

"I've always wanted to go out with you, too, Johnny," she said, not understanding what he meant.

Leaning towards her, he put his hand on her thigh and casually played with the bottom of her skirt. He smiled as he stared into her eyes, and his blue eyes sparkled as his fingers slowly moved beneath her skirt and farther up her thigh. In a weak attempt to stop him, Rachel laughed and put her hand over his, pushing it away gently.

The car felt warm, and the musky smell of his cologne seemed to be all around her.

Moving in slowly, he pressed his lips to hers. The kiss tasted bitter-sweet, like a mixture of cinnamon gum and beer. Gasping for breath, Rachel turned away, suddenly feeling like everything around her was spinning.

"Oh come on, baby. You know

you want me," he said, gently turning her face towards his.

Rachel did want him. She wanted him more than anything.

But not like this.

Trying to pull away, she said, "No, Johnny, I can't do this."

"Sure you can; don't you like me?"

"Of course I like you, but this doesn't feel right," Rachel said.

"Come on, I really like you," he coaxed. "Besides, people like you and me are meant to be together. Everyone expects the captain of the football team and the head cheerleader to date."

Staring at him, Rachel couldn't believe what she was hearing.

Turning to him, she asked, "Do you really want to date me?"

"Sure I do. You trust me, don't you?"

At that moment, every inhibition she had about Johnny was erased. Pushing all reason away, Rachel convinced herself that Johnny was right. They should be together.

Besides, how could something that feels so right be wrong?

* * *

Turning from the fireplace to face her mother, Rachel paused anxiously, suddenly wanting to take everything she had said back when she saw the shocked expression on her mother's face. Caroline sat quietly saying nothing, just staring at her daughter in disbelief.

"I don't know what to say, Rachel," she finally said.

"Mom, I am so sorry," Rachel said quickly, trying to hold back her tears. "If I could take it back, I would. I don't know what came over me last night. I just wanted to believe everything he said. Please don't be mad at me."

Caroline put her arms around her daughter and hugged her close.

Neither of them felt the need to say any words at that moment.

"Rachel, I never wanted you to have to go through anything like this. When I was your age, I made the same decisions, and I know exactly how you feel," her mother said slowly.

Rachel listened as her mother explained how once she had dreams of becoming a professional dancer in New York City. For ten years, she took ballet classes as a child, quickly moving beyond girls who had trained for years longer than she had. By age eleven, she had advanced beyond the soft shoe level and into pointe classes. Favored by all of her teachers as "a star," she knew by the age of eleven that she wanted to be a professional ballerina.

Everyone had high hopes for her.

As a senior at St. Ann's High School, Caroline was popular and actively involved in all aspects of school life. Always thinking of her future, she demanded perfection of herself and refused to become seriously involved with boys so that as soon as she graduated, she would be free to leave her small town and live the life that she had dreamed of since she was a young girl.

She never expected to fall in love.

Andrew Worthington was a sophomore in college at the time he met Caroline. Attractively older and successful in school, he was an exciting alternative to the immature boys in high school. When he introduced her to his college buddies and took her to parties and clubs, she felt special and older.

Naively believing Andrew when he said that they would stay together forever, Caroline allowed herself to become sexually involved with him. As time went by, her dreams were pushed farther and farther into the background. Saying that there would

always be time later, Andrew convinced Caroline that as soon as he graduated, they would move together to the City where they could both have everything they wanted.

She never thought she would get pregnant.

* * *

Suddenly realizing that she too could be pregnant, tears came to Rachel's eyes. The old story had a completely new meaning now.

"Mom, could I be pregnant?" Rachel asked.

Caroline shook her head back and forth with tears coming to her eyes. "I don't know, honey, it's way too early to tell."

Two weeks later, Caroline and Rachel arrived at the hospital early that morning, groggy and tired from not having slept at all the night before. Walking slowly towards the building, Rachel turned to her mother and said, "Mom, I just want to say how sorry I am again."

"Rachel, I love you no matter what you do. Whatever happens today, I will be here to help you."

Walking into the doctor's office, Rachel felt nervous and scared. The office was decorated in warm mauve tones, and painted portraits of mothers holding their infants adorned the walls.

The cozy atmosphere did nothing to ease Rachel's tension. She knew that she didn't belong here.

After her Mom signed some papers at the desk and Rachel had taken her pregnancy test, the two of them sat side-by-side waiting for the results.

A young, pregnant woman and her husband sat close together on the opposite side of the waiting room, holding hands. Smiling, the man placed one hand on her swollen stomach and his other arm around her shoulders. Leaning towards her, he

kissed her softly on the cheek and whispered, "I love you."

Rachel's eyes filled with tears. "I wonder what it feels like to really be loved by a man?" she thought to herself.

A tall redheaded nurse in pink scrubs opened the door and smiled as she said, "Rachel, I have your results now."

With a glance towards her mother, Rachel walked slowly but eagerly towards the door.

"Miss Worthington, you are not pregnant," the nurse said flatly.

Rachel almost leaped with joy at the words she had so wanted to hear.

"But I want to advise you to be more careful in the future. There are much more serious things that can happen other than pregnancy."

"Thank you," Rachel said. "I promise I will never make the same mistake."

The nurse smiled and wished her good luck as she turned to walk away.

As soon as she saw her mother sitting in the waiting room, Rachel ran towards her and threw her arms around her. Shaking uncontrollably, Rachel whispered, "I'm not pregnant."

Both women cried and laughed with joy, completely oblivious to the waiting patients around them. Leaving the hospital, Rachel promised herself silently that she would never allow herself to be put into that position again.

"Mom," she said. "I'm sorry that you missed out on your dreams."

"I'm sorry that you almost had to miss out on yours," said Caroline.

"I guess sometimes you have to make mistakes in order to correct them," Rachel said, suddenly realizing with new clarity what her mother had been trying to tell her all along.

"There are no mistakes, Rachel. Only choices."

Angus

Watts

B. Benjamin

Watts

Neighborhoods like mine never see Santa,

'cept in the malls, and we don't have the fer

no bikes, no dolls, or trees for him to hide

goodies for wicked children of Watts, C-A

You know the ones who live on air and hate

self hate, maybe because mamma smoked up

the food, so only dealers eat round here.

So no turkeys or hams will see a table

this day. Children's toys are taken used when

money is low, and mom's pipe needs to eat.

B. Benjamin 2/28/05

Restlessness



First they brewed coffee
filtered through a cigarette butt
brown tar blended into black java seamlessly
illicit fog engulfing the fraggle rockin trio

Mischief manifested continuously
long before green pants getaways
wide magnolia dens encompassing frequent climbers
chance acceleration produced pounding & puzzled eight

Then a lull came
decisions undecided
eventually made (mysteriously)
carried out with the sofa

Later, paper crucified the innocent
while serpents curled around porcelain & one man died
actual problems ignored & avoided in those halls
yet leaves burned—small fiery circles under its dim fluorescents

Conspiracies conjured by the squatter
American flag hung vertically—stars on the ground
rooftop landfill & sentry post jutted above
demon pigs snoring ignorantly inside interceptors

Eventually they escaped by eviction
tent poles piled over unidentifiable stains embedded in carpet
air ebbed past a stereo & exposed asbestos exhibits
no admittance—what remains is inaccessible

Argus

A Man Called Dog

Daniel F. Horvath

Few persons probably have ambitions to become professional boxers. Yet there comes to almost every man a time when he wishes he could put over a knock-out punch. Rarely, though, outside of the ring, is the clean knockout ever delivered. There are several reasons for this. One is that few except practiced, trained boxers have learned just the right knack of "timing a punch"—releasing all the power of a blow at the moment it lands. A more important reason, though, is that few except professional pugilists or experienced amateurs know the location of the vulnerable points at which a well-timed blow, delivered with sufficient force, will bring about the sudden paralysis that constitutes a knockout.

—Gene Tunney, Heavyweight Boxing Champion, June, 1925

It is unlikely a boy called Chien read the champ's words in 1925 because, had he acknowledged the rarity of an untrained knockout, he may never have achieved his local legend status in the very same year. That year, like others before it, a tent show arrived in the town of Coulee Crouche, presently Cankton, Louisiana, a town remarkable for being wholly unremarkable. However, in 1925, when the show's organizer walked in the town's general store, a store that resembled hundreds he had entered, he was toting a hardened prize fighter and a poster of that same fighter and was likely ill-prepared for the one of a kind greeting he and his fighter received that day.

"Shet, Snuff," the store owner said, "I got a 15-year-old in the backyard whip his ass."

"Come on..." said the organizer, laughing unaccompanied.

"OK," he said after his solitary

laugh subsided. "Well, I'll tell you what...put up your money. You know, like the fella says, put your money where your mouth is; we'll be glad to take your money, if that's whatcha want." And the bet was on.

Chien, a 15-year-old who happened to be the store owner's son, was not a big man, nor even a man, but he entered the ring regardless and matched his wiry frame to the barrel-chested fighter from afar. In the first round, Chien broke his hand hitting the guy—broke his *right* hand hitting the guy—yet he finished the fight with just his left hand, despite his most common right-handedness. And though the odds state that "few except professional pugilists or experienced amateurs know the location of the vulnerable points," the 15-year-old called Chien knocked the prize fighter out with his left hand in the third round and thus became a living legend to a small community of people who had not heard the last

of the boy they called "Dog" in French.

Oddly, the boy called Dog, who later named his own dog "Boy," was to become a dentist, perhaps in anticipation of a life that might require the replacement of one or more teeth because the infamous prize fight would not be his last, just his last in the ring. Still, fighting was but one crowned tooth in a set of amazing chompers. In fact, while attending college in New Orleans, he would often come up short on cash because Depression era booze could take its toll on the billfold. So, like any self-respecting legend, he'd get on the street with a pair of dark glasses and a pencil box and sell pencils like a blind man. His irreverence for those less fortunate did not end with the blind, however, as he'd also bring his cadaver home with him on break and throw knives at it for practice.

Alas, this irreverence for the dead began long before his college years; it began even before his legendary fight. Like a real life Tom and Huck, he and a cousin, who were not far removed from that fictional setting, became very curious about a particular memorial service—that of an elderly African-American man. Their youthful curiosity focused on an early practice that required mourners to tie the deceased to a flat surface when the death occurred unexpectedly in a seated position and to also place quarters over the eyes of the deceased when the unexpected death left the eyes open. So, the adventurous youths decided it would be

humorous, to them of course, to return the deceased to his seated position during the at home service by slipping beneath the bed and skillfully cutting the ropes free with an ever-present pocket knife. The overall effect was in fact conveniently heightened when the upright motion flung the quarters to simultaneously reveal the still open eyes. The punishment that followed in no way deterred future tomfoolery, and Chien's later prominence in the community only gave him a wider audience.

As a dentist in Sunset, Louisiana, Chien was given many opportunities to practice his own brand of humor patient by patient, and since he always maintained his status as a fighter, few, if any, challenged his practice.

Patient 1:

"*Sha*, I'm gonna have to give you a shot."

"Oh gosh," she said, "how come? I just went to Dr. Bertinot; he give me a shot in the behind; now you gonna give me one in the mouth."

"*Mais Sha*, if I had my preference, I'd give it to you in da behind, too."

Patient 2:

"Doc," she said, "I hate to come here. I believe I'd rather have a baby than come here to you, you know?"

"Well, *Sha*, make up your mind; I gotta know how to adjust ma chair."

It was rumored that such flirtatious behavior sometimes led to infidelity, but again few challenged Chien's practice. And even if such practice was termed *sexism*, the word

was simply not in Chien's vocabulary nor was any other -ism, which may or may not have applied to his practice.

Patient 3 and almost 4:

"Chien, they got doves on da Leger place. He say we can shoot dis afternoon."

"Well that's good; I'm gonna finish with this fella, and that's it."

"Nah, there's a fella still waitin' on da colored side."

"I tell you what. When I show you that syringe, you say 'got damn you gonna stick me with dat big needle?'"

"OK...GOT DAMN YOU GONNA STICK ME WITH DAT BIG NEEDLE?"

"IF YOU THINK DAT'S BIG, YOU SHOULD SEE THE NEEDLE I GOT FOR DAT BOY ON DA OTHER SIDE!"

SLAM went the door.

Still, Chien was an equal opportunity offender, and he was not one to discriminate when it came to insult or injury, as the local police often discovered. One night, following a religiously practiced drinking binge, he ran into a telephone pole in the middle of Sunset near his home. The heavy Oldsmobile bumper made an audible and visible crack in the pole. So violent was the crash, it alerted the attention of the single patrol car, and once on the scene, the two patrolmen informed the good doctor that he must surely pay for the damages.

"It's just cracked!"

"But we have to call the electric company; we can't leave it like dis, Chien."

"OK, jus give me a minute." While the patrolmen watched, the good doctor then slowly walked around to the driver's side door. He deliberately rotated the chrome handle on the glossy blue surface and then seated himself behind the wheel. He checked his rearview mirror and pulled the car away from the accident. Then, as the patrolmen looked on with amazement and fear as they desperately fled for safety, Chien slammed the car into first and lunged it forward into the pole for a second time, this time sending the pole crashing atop his car. After exiting the car he said, "Now I'll pay for it. Now it's broken," to which the patrolmen could only shake their heads.

Occasionally, Chien had to pay for his misdeeds, but this only added spice to his already spicy diet. His actual diet consisted of as much wild game as he could kill. And, in typical Chien fashion, all animals became fair game. Once he saw a small hog at the end of what had been a long, fruitless hunt and managed to kill it. He brought it back home, butchered it himself, and had a big roast soon after. He invited his friends, and while drinking and eating, something he truly enjoyed, he described in great detail the hunting trip that had produced the feast.

Three or four days after the feast, a man who hadn't been invited to the gathering came into the office with his wife. "Chien, my wife needs some false teeth." Chien made a quick examination of the wife's teeth,

and with agreement in his narrowed eyes, he asked what price the couple was willing to pay—in a small town in the fifties prices ranged from fifty to three hundred dollars for the supplies needed. "I want the best you got." Chien thought this strange as the man was a farmer like most in the small community, which was once dubbed *Sweet Potato Capital of the World*. Still, he made the teeth in his own office: he had become quite adept at manufacturing the perfect smile. After a time, pleased with his own craftsmanship and the infrequent chance to work with the finest materials, he happily fitted the woman with her new smile and awaited the first payment. Nevertheless, despite the craftsmanship and despite the fine materials, the farmer never paid. It was not uncommon for farmers to take a while to pay, but it troubled Chien that this farmer had specifically requested the most expensive set. Of course, it wasn't long before the still wiry, still agile Chien crossed paths with the farmer in town, as there were few streets to travel in Sunset.

"Hey, Shnook," which was a term Chien adopted for anyone whose name he could not remember, "what...uh...you wanted the best there was...you don't pay!"

"I'm gonna pay you as soon as you pay me for that *hog* you killed on my place."

"OK, Shnook, we even." No threats, no fists, and no thoughts of retribution entered into Chien's mind. To Sidney Olivier, otherwise

known as Chien, a "well-timed" prank "delivered with sufficient force" was as important as a "well-timed" punch, and whether that prank or punch came from an amateur or a pro, it made little difference to a man called Dog.

Angus

Walls

Jessica N Paul

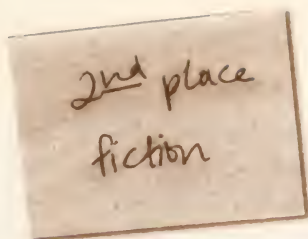
Walls

Everyone hides behind some wall
That no one else will see—
A wall that brings one comfort and
Some sense of tranquility.

Some will hide behind a mask
Concealing gifts within.
Others build a fence of brick
And stone to trap them in.

Some will hide behind a front
That bears conformity.
Others seek confinement in
A world for them only.

No matter what your barrier is
Or how secret it may stay,
I hope someday that you will see
The danger in hiding this way.



Breaking Ida... Breaking the Omen

Charlotte D. Spradling

The creaking planks of the farmhouse porch mimicked her stiff, achy joints. Once again, Ida watched as the figures faded down the dirt path into the humid morning mist of daybreak. When they were completely out of sight she quickly turned and scurried inside to get ahead of her chores before another day with Elgie dawned.

Searching for Elgie had become a chore Ida hated; that child never stayed put. Of her seven children, the youngest was sure to finish turning her graying hair white. Ida, past her prime, suffered from "the mid-life malady." Fast-changing physical and mental conditions greatly affected her ability to keep up with her still sleeping five-year-old.

She was a tall, big-boned woman supporting a statuesque frame that nature was sculpting into a matronly silhouette, but still shadowed by fading youth, she started each day the same. Before Milton or the children lay their feet to the floor, her silky waist-length hair was gathered into a ponytail, then mechanically twirled over and over, around her finger, as if spinning cotton to make thread. She twirled it until it shrunk into a man-

ageable length; then it was knotted, rolled into a ball, and pinned square in the middle of the back of her head.

Her sharp jaw line, straight nose, and hair tightly pulled away from her face gave her a calloused look that seemed out of place with her translucent crystal eyes of pale blue; but in spite of the scabrous countenance, her and Elgie's smile were the same.

Ida was the wife of Milton Bryant, a hardworking cotton mill worker and tenant farmer. They had three boys, Harold D., the oldest; Waylon C.; and Linwood B. The initials did not stand for anything except for a middle sound to go with their last name. As for the girls, it was more proper for them to have a middle name. Eva Pearl was the oldest girl, second to Harold; followed by Ada Earle; Fannie Merle; and six years later, there was Elgie Vernelle. Many times Ida would say, "It's an omen, her name's differ'nt the rest, don't rhyme with nothing, 'I shoulda' known better. I named Betty Jean *before* she was born; they won't no rhyme in her name either and look what happened." Wounds still lay heavy in her heart when she spoke of Betty Jean, her stillborn daughter, the

last one, until Elgie arrived. When reflecting, she would say quietly to Milton, "I knowed the day she died, I felt it in my spirit."

Ida now regretted that the name Elgie Vernelle didn't rhyme like the others. Nevertheless, Ida loved all of her children and raised them in "the admonition of the Lord" on their isolated tenant farm, where they shared the struggle of survival in the midst of the Depression, thanking God every day for Milton's job.

Rising before dawn each day, save Sunday, Milton's long stride carried him down the sandy path to the blacktop road, his lantern swinging in step to his gait, illuminating each step as he went and hoping to hitch a ride into town. Each night he arrived home as he had left that morning, embracing the dark, while Ida watched in the distance for the growing flame of the lantern signaling his return.

It was the 1930's when most poor Carolina farmers still used horses. For Milton, it was a necessity to leave his horse for farm work, mainly done now by the older boys for plowing, moving tobacco from the fields to the barn, or hauling sweet potatoes to be sold at market on halves with the owner of the farm. It was sinful and a demonstration of poor stewardship to use a horse for transportation when there was so much work to be done, so he trod each day in grateful silence.

From September to March the long ginnin' hours at the cotton mill assured that Ida and the boys were

left with double chores. It couldn't be helped. Managing a farm was difficult, at any time, for an average woman, but there was nothing average about Ida. Her days were spent preparing the season's harvest, stitching and darning their clothes, gathering food from the garden for meals, feeding the livestock; and on the days that she could, she would go to the fields as a hired hand. She kept her children clean, her house as spotless as a run-down farm would allow and delegated strict chores to the older children. Hard times demanded that she be firm, if they were all to eat.

In addition to their chores, the older children usually tended to Elgie, the rambunctious child with insatiable giggles, but today they were hired-out hands and Ida stayed home to finish preparations for the brutal winter ahead, the demise of summer not far away.

In a couple of weeks, after tobacco barning season, the others would return to school. Soon, she and Elgie would spend their sun-kissed days dragging tow sacks through polka-dot fields of white cotton while autumn breezes spoke of the harsh winter ahead.

"Better to break the young-un now," she told Milton, as tears distorted the iridescent blue of pained eyes. "I won't be able to find her in the fields if she ain't broke from that hidin'; better to do it here—at home—than wait 'til I waste half a day tryin' to find her. You know how she is, stubborn and all. There won't be no time to play foolish games with

Elgie. Yes, today is the day; it has to be done."

"Be easy with her, Ida. Try not to break her spirit; she just don't understand."

Elgie was a small and wiry child, pretty and vibrant – a joyful girl. Her hair was shimmering rust with natural auburn highlights that glistened in curls, loosely caressing the top of her head and delicate face; longer free flowing waves fell around her neck and matched freckles that dotted the bridge of her nose. A resplendent child, her personality was energetic, bubbly, intuitive, and determined.

As Ida ran the clothes through the wringer washer on the almost rotted back porch, the tin roof "ping-ed" from a falling acorn or echoed the hollow scratch from the dance of a squirrel. The back-porch screens had long been rusted out, and the clapboards on the whole house were black with age, but Elgie loved it there with her mother. Delightful squeals floated into the air as the wooden washtub filled with flattened pieces of clothing as they cleared the wringers, falling like stiffened sun-dried worms atop each other.

The Indian summer sun gave Ida relief as the heat soothed her aching shoulders while hanging the clothes. Elgie drew circles in the powdered sand, chased the chickens, and hopscotched under the senescent oak with its gnarled roots twisting above the ground, its fading leaves turning prematurely, like Ida's hair. They each were in their own world: Ida planning the noontime meal, and

Elgie entertaining forbidden thoughts of hiding.

Usually she waited until her mother started the noontime meal and, while she was occupied, would quietly slip off to hide. Ida would call, beg, and finally threaten, until Elgie was found. No matter how severely her mother scolded, Elgie showered generous hugs with promises never to fool her again, but each time the sport of the game took her over and the rush was on, holding out until she was discovered. Even the strokes across her spindly legs with a switch proved futile.

Back inside the house, the meal preparations were underway. "Can I go outside now, mama?"

Knowing that the children were soon coming in from the fields, Ida relented and let Elgie go outside and play; soon the winter days would confine them all. Upon Elgie's departure she sternly warned, "Elgie, stay out from under the house. You got no business there, and don't go hidin'; I cain't play today."

"Why cain't I play under the house, Mama, alls I want to do is draw in the sand; it's cool under there."

Fixing her eyes sternly upon Elgie, she gruffly said, "You heard what I said."

Ida knew the excessive heat from the prolonged summer forced the snakes from the fields. They would crawl up to the top of the brick piers near the floor boards of the house.

Irritated at the child's persistence, she again cautioned, "Elgie Vernelle,

stay out from under the house!"

Escorting a pout, Elgie turned on her bare heel, grunted, and left.

Grateful for the electric stove that had replaced the wood one, Ida could now prepare the meals much faster. She wished that soon they would be able to get a modern clothes washer, as well, but feeding seven children was a chore in itself, and there was not much left over for luxuries; she was grateful that Milton's seasonal wages bought a couple of hogs, seeds, material for clothing, and new pairs of shoes for everyone.

With the noonday meal prepared, Ida called, "Elllgieeeeeee!" No response. Elllgieeeee, come on now. Come on and wash up!" Still no response.

Wiping her hands on her apron, she called again as she approached the front screen door. Still no answer. "I knew it. I knew she would do this, but she won't do it no more. I'll break her today sure as my name's Ida," she angrily muttered.

Coming out of the house, she crossed the wide porch, her faded calico housedress gathered in her fists as she hurriedly made it down the high steps into the bare yard of fine sand. Through the gaggle of scratching chickens pecking a meal of doodle bugs, she stopped to snap a switch from the nandina bush beside the porch. "Elllgieeeeeee!" Calling shrilly as she went, she pulled the switch through her fingers, stripping the leaves and exposing the prickly limb.

"I told her, I warned her good." Although she was angry, fear rose in

her chest about the possibilities of Elgie being under the house. Ida was not one to let fear rule and neither was Elgie.

Circling around the house, stooping at intervals, Ida peered and called, "Elgie, come out, come out now!" In a desperate attempt to find the girl, she went inside the house, knelt on the plank floors, and peered through the knotty pine holes to the underside of the house. With frantic, mixed emotions, she scurried from room to room finding the knotholes, ripping out the paper stuffings, looking on top of and beside each pier. Behind one of the piers a small glint of daylight cast its faint glow to the underside of the house and fell on the familiar pale pink fabric that Ida recognized as the dress she had made four seasons ago for Merle, now passed to Elgie as a play dress.

Closer to the hole she placed her crystal blue eye; the cool musty updraft from the sand beneath quickly caused it to dry. Switching from one tired eye to the other, she saw Elgie backed upright against the maroon brick pier. Both tiny fists tightly clutched the hem of her dress up to her delicate mouth. She muffled excited giggles; lacy fringe curled between fingers and hid a mischievous smile.

Ida could see her curly hair, ruffled loosely, almost within pulling distance of through the plank floor. Ida peered closer, and then suddenly withdrew. Recoiling in terror as she heard the innocent faint giggles directly beneath coming from her

baby girl. There was no more time for pleas or bargaining. Snatching Milton's shotgun from the closet in a moment of desperation, she rushed out of the house, down the steep wooden steps, and stooped to peer under the house. She yelled, "Come out Elgie, come out, right now!"

A torrent of giggles followed, "You come get me mama, that's how we play the game."

Fear exploding in her chest and with unrelenting determination in her voice she said, "Elgie, if you don't come out right now, I'll shoot you out!" Kneeling to see under the house, painful joints dug into the dirt as she raised the gun to point at her baby, appearing set to follow through.

Panic and confusion gripped Elgie as she stepped from behind her fortress in front of the gun and ran past her mother in hysterics. "Don't shoot me, mama!" she yelled as she slipped past Ida's grip. Not able to hold the frantic child, Elgie broke and ran down the dusty path toward the other children, now coming in from the fields.

Screaming she ran toward them, shouting, "Run! Run! Mama's gonna' shoot us!" With disbelief on their faces, they froze watching as their mother quickly tossed the gun into a soft patch of grass, gathered her dress to her groin, and, shaking off the middle-age stiffness, ran in full pursuit with youthful vigor.

"Catch her, Harold, catch her! Slap her, slap her head!" She yelled to the oldest. Totally confused, but

trusting his mother, Harold chased the racing shadow as it swept past them toward the blacktop road ahead. Instinctively, Harold cast his body on top of the frantic child and pulled her down into the parched September dust.

Ida's ball had come loose from the back of her head, her sweaty gray hair fell in strands all about her face; she swiped at the tangled mess as she ran so she could see. She continued to yell, "Slap her head; slap her head!"

Running breathlessly past the others who stood petrified at the sight, she grabbed Elgie by the arm and pulled her from beneath Harold and slapped her full force on the head; she slapped and slapped until she finally felt the spatter of the bulbous body of the Black Widow she had seen crawl into her curls through the knotty pine hole. Digging through the rusty mass of curls, she found the squished carcass and cast it from her daughter's matted hair.

Shrinking in relief, she fell between the dusty rows of the field, buried her head in the dirt, and cried in torrents, leaving Elgie in snuffles and sobs, but clinging to her crying mother, saying, "Don't cry mama, please don't cry; Elgie won't hide no more."

Angus

A Reason to Cherish the Day

David

A reason to cherish the day

Warm gestures of a sun trying to trace,
Awaking to ~~the~~ the moment of a
nice cool breeze,

Lost in your eyes I pray,
Solitude is the place we visit today,

With my soul united with yours,
We have endless possibilities and
open doors,

For we don't know exactly what is next,
But because we ~~too~~ love each other
we we'll try our best,

So as we sit and wonder our day dreams
away,
Let's look forward to the same effort
the next day.

1st place
Art



Untitled

Elliot Weisberg

Angels



Super

Joe N. Birn III



American Soldier

Leslie A. Tong

Angels

3rd place
Art



Siren

Miguel A. Bobadilla.



Divine

Charles F. W. 1. n

Angels

2nd place
Art



Refuge

Shauma Atkins



Mystery

Shauna Atkins

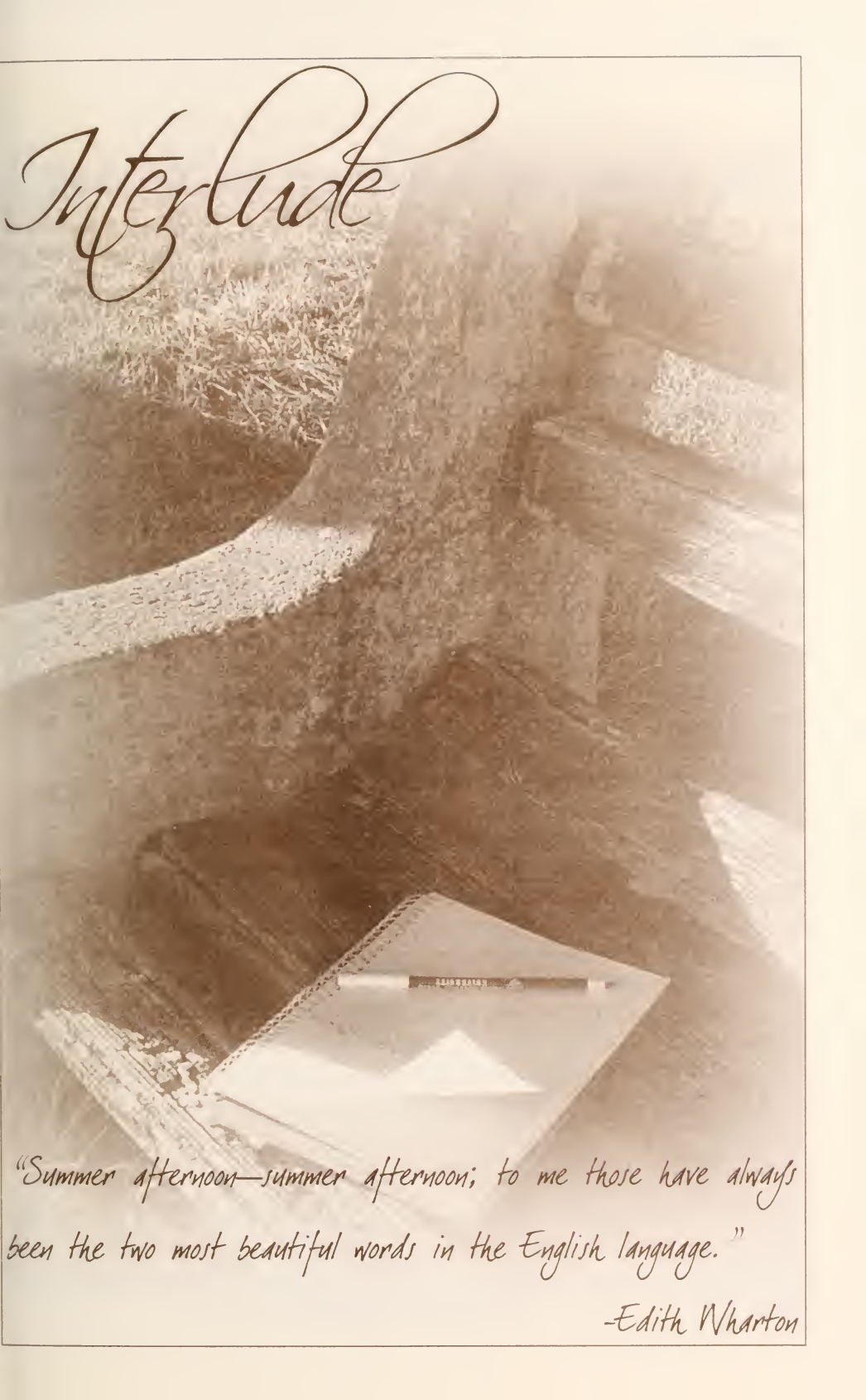
Angels



Ode to Clyde

Shelton Meacham

Interlude

A sepia-toned photograph of a grassy lawn with a wooden bench in the background. In the foreground, a spiral-bound notebook and a pen are resting on the grass.

"Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language."

-Edith Wharton

Angels

Slow Down



Slow down, no more to make haste;
Set pace.
See the wind blow through the trees;
Such ease.
Feel the warmth of the sun's ray;
Each day.
Watch the birds fly high in the sky;
They glide.
Smell the air after a rain it seems;
So clean.
Hear the child as he laughs out loud;
So proud.
Feel the pain of a young mother's grief;
She weeps.
Taste the bittersweet truths we all bare;
And share.
Seek the very essence of God's being;
Through believing.
Discover the precious gift we are given;
In livin'!
Remember when life gets you wound;
Slow down!

Conversations on the Porch

Jiff Wether

CONVERSATIONS ON THE PORCH

~~CONVERSATIONS~~

GAVEN, DO A RAIN DANCE.

WOAH,

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

NOW

HUSH YOUR DIRTY MOUTH

CROPS!

YEAH WE LIKE THAT

ELECTRICITY!

OK, NOW I'M GONNA CRUSH YOUR SOUL

BUBBLES!?

WHERE'S MY BOWL?

NONE

WATCH MY POODLE DRED.

2 BUBBLE DINGLE BERRY!

INSANE TOY FOR INSANE KEYS...

WUN DOLLAH!!!

TELL ME WHAT JUST HAPPENED!

IT DID.

You know what they say about PLYBACK

RUIN.

NOT ON THE WOOD!!

HUH?

I THINK I HEAR THE RAIN NOW.

The Adventures of Sandals

Catasha Williams

The alarm used its loud harmonic frequencies to remind me it was time to begin my scheduled day. After getting dressed, I looked down and realized I had nothing to protect my bare feet. I walked in the closet and studied the rows of shoes to compare how they would look with my "selected threads of the day." There were tennis shoes, dress shoes, casual shoes, sandals, and slippers. My eyes focused on the brown, black, navy, and clear shoes. I carefully chose a pair of brown sandals. The sandals were made of braided leather with two-inch-thick soles and a backstrap. Before leaving, I decided to give the sandals a safety test. I strolled down the hallway to remind myself of how I needed to walk to prevent the embarrassment of falling. It's okay to fall in the privacy of your own home, but not in public. I had three classes to teach and a one-hour conference ahead of me. In other words, I had four hours of public viewing for the day.

After teaching my first class, I had to walk from Russell Hall to Kyser Hall to fulfill my scheduled conference duties. During the hike to Kyser, I received a few compliments

from students. All of which were directed at my brown sandals with braided leather, two-inch-thick soles, and a back strap. I finally reached Kyser, and all I could think about was how I had to walk up three flights of stairs. I was already breathing heavily. After reaching the second flight of stairs, I began to hear a flapping noise. Could it be my breathing? I could only hear the noise when I'd take steps, and one of my feet felt slightly lighter than the other. I looked down and realized half of the sole of my sandal was detached. I slowly took the last few steps and changed the way I walked to avoid making a scene. I didn't want anyone to notice my brown sandal with braided leather, a back strap, and a two-inch-thick sole that was flapping.

I hurried to the graduate assistants' office to limit the eyes that focused on one of my sandals. After greeting the crowd, I asked if anyone had access to superglue. No one had any, but there was Elmer's glue a few feet away. I tried spreading the glue around the sole in hopes that it would stick. I took a few steps to see if it worked. Then, I heard the flapping noise again. I remembered that my

mother-in-law was at my house watching my two children. I could just call her and tell her which pair of sandals to bring. I could change shoes and avoid being humiliated for the remainder of the day. I called her to see if she could bring me another pair of sandals.

After laughing hysterically for about five minutes, she informed me that my father-in-law had just left with the car so she wouldn't have a way to get them to me. I informed my peers of another failed mission. Someone suggested stapling my sandal. I tried stapling the sole in hopes that it would hold the sandal together. After a few steps, I heard the flapping noise again. Finally, someone suggested strong tape. I used two strips of tape to wrap the sandal to the sole of my shoe. It actually worked! I had two more classes ahead of me; I had to walk back to Russell for the second class, then back to Kyser for the third class. After the third class, I could walk to my car and head home.

I made it through the last two classes without hearing the flapping noise. I even informed the classes about why I had tape on one of my sandals. The students couldn't help but stare at my brown sandal with a back strap and a thick two-inch sole with two strips of clear tape wrapped around it. I was halfway to my car, which was in front of Russell, when I began to hear a flapping sound again. I looked down at my injured sandal and realized the tape was still holding it together. I looked at the other

sandal and noticed the sole was almost off. I was only about ten feet away from my car. If I could only make it to that point, I'd be okay. Just as that thought came to my mind, I felt a change in my walk. I noticed I was walking lopsided. I looked down and saw the entire two-inch-thick sole lying on the ground about two steps away. I couldn't believe what had just happened. I quickly picked the sole up and began speed walking to my car, not caring who saw me. Once I got there, a sense of relief came over me. What a day, I thought to myself.

In Search of Satiety

Sharon Johnson

I am so hungry all the time.
Please come closer to this fence
That separates us like
The steel frames
In fast food lanes
Where starving students
Part with their diets and cents.

I long to lick a blue snow cone.
Foot-long hotdogs would be dandy
Polished off with a
White funnel cake
Until my bellyache
Is as sweet a memory as
This giraffe begging for your cotton candy.



1st place
fiction

Musings 45

Hans Von Hoppenheimer Meets the Abominable Snowman

Derek Leonard

The brave, intrepid hero and famed adventurer, Hans Von Hoppenheimer, is about to face his most challenging adventure yet. He exits his tent, the only spot of color in a frozen wasteland of swirling, white snow. The temperature is well below zero, and Von Hoppenheimer lets out a hearty chuckle; the cold will not stop him. No, it had not stopped him when he had raced his dog sled team across Alaska and gotten lost for days in a blizzard. He had still won the Grand Championship of Dog Racing, hadn't he? Sure he had been short a dog when he crossed the finish line, but he had been hungry and, besides, that wasn't really the point.

Flecks of snow wet his thick, curly beard, and he pulls his stocking cap lower over his chilled brow. Today, he would climb Mt. Everest, but unlike those wimps that had gone before him, he would climb it in nothing more than his swimming trunks. Well, and gloves, boots, and a hat, of course—let's not get crazy. And he would do it all alone.

With a pat on the head for his faithful, yet ferocious wolfhound, which he calls Fang for obvious reasons, Hans Von Hoppenheimer begins his trek to the foot of the imposing mountain. When he reaches the base of the monstrous thing, he looks up to see that the mountain looms large, and it

seems to gleam an almost metallic silver in the morning sunlight. He shivers, already well beyond cold as the wind begins to pick up, blowing the snow forcefully onto his bare chest and shoulders.

He climbs for what feels like miles and miles and hours and hours until he is utterly exhausted. But, really, it has only been a few feet and a few minutes. Hoppenheimer pauses, still unwilling to give up and return to his lonely camp. Oh, he would climb this mountain in nothing more than his swimming trunks, he swears. Oh, no, he would not be stopped.

Von Hoppenheimer ventures on once more. He is fully involved in a vertical climb up the side of the mountain, when he hears a crunch in the snow that is not from his own boot. He turns his head in sudden surprise, still clinging to the wall of icy rock.

"Who's there?" he calls out imperviously. Who dares to wreck his grand adventure? Hans Von Hoppenheimer yells out in shock as he sees that it is none other than the Abominable Snowman! Von Hoppenheimer tries to climb to safety, but it is no use! The fearsome snowman is already upon him! He looks on in horror as it begins to speak.

"Good God! Why is this floor all wet? Is that ice?!" The beast lifts its feet, looking at the ground. "Harold, what have

you been...get off of that screen door right this instant! It is not meant to be climbed on! How many times do I have to tell you? Get down before you hurt yourself!" *It pauses, crossing its arm and tapping its white hairy paw.* "What is that on your face? Where did you get that hair? Is that your grandpa's toupee?! Harold Joseph Brown! And why is the door open? You are letting snow right into the..."

Von Hoppenheimer looks on in confusion and rubs his bristly chin. Who was this Harold Joseph Brown that the Abominable Snowman was speaking of? Obviously, it was one of its most recent victims. Von Hoppenheimer decides that there is only one thing for him to do. He must save himself from this treacherous beast. Von Hoppenheimer would have to jump from his perch upon the icy wall to the snow below. He leaps but is stopped suddenly. Oh no! Blood is coming out of Hoppenheimer's mouth in a river-like rush as he dangles precariously and almost unbelievably by his cheek, which has fused to the frozen wall. Von Hoppenheimer, in a rare state of weakness, passes out. What is to become of our intrepid adventurer and hero?

"Omigod!" Harold's mom rushed forward as she watched her five-year-old son try to jump down from the screen door he had been climbing. She yelped as she saw a stray piece of metal go straight through his cheek, hooking him like a landed fish. His body flopped onto the kitchen tiles, and blood began to pour from the wound in his cheek.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God." She fell to the floor and scuttled forward on her hands and knees to her fallen child. The piece of metal had gone straight

through his cheek, and she would have to take it out to get him to the hospital. Gagging and crying all at the same time, she lifted his body up as gently as she could and slid the metal piece out. She hauled him to the car and then on to the emergency room.

She sat tapping her foot impatiently as the doctor stitched up her son's cheek. His light brown hair was tousled, and he looked so small, his freckles pale against the rest of his face. Harold was temporarily sharing a room with another kid, and the kid's mother sat next to that bed. The neighboring mother sat staring at Harold's mother, staring at her wet, white fur slippers and her blood-streaked shirt. "Humph!" the other mother turned her head away in disapproval. Harold's mom rolled her eyes. Perhaps that lady wouldn't be quite so haughty if she had to deal with her five-year-old boy instead of the angelic-looking little girl lying in the bed.

The doctor sighed and finally moved away from Harold's face. "Well, that's it then. He just needed six stitches, Mrs. Brown. He'll be just fine, and you can come back in a week or two to have the stitches removed. Now, um, the only thing left is that, um, Child Services would like to speak with you, Mrs. Brown."

"What?!"

"Well, they usually like to interview certain cases, just to, um, you know, be sure. Now, we can just leave Harold here to get some rest until you are finished. A nurse will come sit with him for a while in case he wakes up."

"If I must," she sighed. The doctor ushered her out of the room.

Hans Von Hoppenheimer blinks his eyes open ever so slowly. Where was he? Had the Abominable Snowman carried him to safety? Could it be true? He lifts his head up from the pillow he has been lying upon and finds that his cheek is throbbing. What happened?

He remembered climbing, then making the jump, and then nothing else. He looks over as something moves at the front of his tent. It's a guide from the nearby village, who he had talked to before he had begun this last trek. He packs some sort of gooey cream onto Hoppenheimer's cheek, which seems to soothe it a bit. Then Hoppenheimer takes a sip of some water, feeling very sleepy...

Harold's mom thought perhaps that she would kill her kid when she got home, and maybe abuse him a little like these rotten people were accusing her of doing. The woman in the pinstriped skirt and jacket set leaned across the table, looking at Harold's mom as if she were a bug under a microscope. "So you say that your son fell on a piece of metal that was jutting out of the screen door when he jumped off of it? Mrs. Brown, what exactly was he doing up there? Weren't you watching him?"

Harold's mom's lips thinned into a straight line. "I told you before. Yes, I was watching him, but I was in the living room, and he was in the kitchen. And sometimes he climbs on things. He plays make-believe sometimes," she smiled crookedly. "When he plays, he is Hans Von Hoppenheimer, the famed adventurer. I don't know quite where he got that name." She stopped and looked over at the two people who had been investigating her for over thirty minutes. They wrote a few things down and

looked back up at her.

"I do not beat or abuse my child. He just has a vivid imagination and a tendency to get into some trouble. I know it looks like we're here a little too often, but I can't always stop him before he gets hurt. Don't you have any children? Any little boys?" They shook their heads, and Harold's mom began to think that they just might bring her to jail.

An hour and a half later, Harold's mom deposited him into the car and slammed the doors shut. Arrgh! This kid! What was she going to do with him? What had he been thinking? How many times had she told him not to climb on the screen door?

"Just you wait, Harold. Just wait until your father gets home! We'll see what he has to say about all of this!"

When Harold awoke, he thought that perhaps he had better not wait in the kitchen for his dad and went to hide instead. His mom sure would be a lot more fun if she was just a little bit more adventurous, that was for sure. He heard a door slam and ran to hide at the top of the stairs. His dad was home...

His mom started right away. "He had ice all over the floor...glued Grandpa's toupee to his face—I don't know how I'll get that off—had the door wide open, let snow in...climbed the screen door in his swim trunks...And, oh yeah, your son taped cardboard fangs onto Buttons..."

"He taped fangs onto your poo-dle?" Harold's dad began to laugh. Harold shrugged his shoulders and hid his own grin with his hand.

"Don't you dare laugh! We had to

go to the emergency room to get him stitches! And I was interviewed by Child Services! They think I attacked my own son!"

Harold stopped grinning as his father let out a huge sigh and said, "Again?" He heard his dad's big, lumbering footsteps on the stairs and darted into his room to hide beneath his covers. "Harold? Harold?" The door opened, and Harold thought that perhaps this was finally the end. Oh, he had lived a wonderful seven years, but he felt that tonight would most definitely be his last.

An hour later, he was still sniffing. Grounded for two whole months, and no TV or comic books! And no, absolutely no, adventure or travel magazines! Just wait! Wait till they see! He would become a famous adventurer one day, and then they'd be sorry! They'd all be sorry! He wiped his cheeks furiously and punched his pillow. Harold lay down and fell asleep, exhausted after such an exciting day.

The early morning light shone brightly into his room, drifting across the stacks of *National Geographic* and *Outdoor* magazines beside his bed, the stacks that would be removed by the end of the day. The light glared into Harold's face, and he blinked his eyes against the harshness of it. Morning, but what good was it that it was Sunday morning when he couldn't even watch cartoons? What a wasted day! And all because he fell down, as if he had done it on purpose! And hadn't he suffered enough? He touched his sore and swollen cheek.

His mom and dad were already in

the den reading the newspaper when he went downstairs, so he climbed atop a chair and began to eat the bacon that his mom had left out for him on the table. As he chewed, he looked over to the screen door. His dad had already fixed the metal piece that had broken off, and there was nothing poking out to mar the cool, metallic surface. It gleamed in the morning sunlight.

Buttons ran into the kitchen and yapped, jumping near Harold's chair, begging for a piece of bacon. "No, Buttons!" Harold pushed her down and stared again at that gleaming, silvery screen door. It was quite a monstrous door, an imposing thing. Why, something only a brave, intrepid hero and famed adventurer could climb. If that said adventurer could climb that door, then there was no telling what he could do! Why, he could climb Everest! Harold left the dining room table, cleaned his plate in the sink, and pushed his chair back into its proper place.

Fang, Hans Von Hoppenheimer's famed dog, barks to get his master's attention. Hoppenheimer throws a piece of jerky to his wolfhound, his lone friend in this vast wilderness. They both turn to stare at the imposing mountain that stands before them.

Last time, the Abominable Snowman had saved him from certain doom, carrying him to the safety of his own tent, but this time, Hoppenheimer would succeed all on his own. He strokes the scar that now curves down his cheek, just one more battle scar from one more adventure. Hans von Hoppenheimer surges forward with his faithful wolfhound, not yet daring to admit defeat by the great mountain of Everest.

"HAROLD!!!!!"

Junk in My Trunk

W McRae

Oh, I love tasting plain, seasoned, and sour chips,
 Drizzled with French Onion or cheese dip.
 Nutty Buddy, Oatmeal Pies, and Swiss Rolls,
 I gobble up til my belly folds.
 Peppermint pickles filled with Kool-Aid,
 You know, the red kind, that Big Mama made!
 Now & Later, Tootsie Rolls, Green Apple Blow Pops, and so.
 Starburst, Skittles, I love to eat the candied rainbow.
 Oreo, Famous Amos, Mrs. Fields,
 Ain't got nothing on my late night milk and cookie meals.
 Chocolate, chocolate, chocolate! Need I say more?
 Caramel, peanuts, pecans hidden under the chocolate-layered door.
 Pralines & Pecans, Homemade Vanilla, Cookie Dough, only Blue Bell will do.
 Add chocolate or caramel syrup & pecan pie (don't forget to heat it)
 and have an ice cream fondue.

Can't forget Nachos (add peppers) and Chilli Dogs,
 Watch me eat'em like a lil hog.
 Fair surprises bring Funnel Cakes and Caramel Apples,
 Washing it all down with an ice tea Snapple.
 Every time my mom reminds me about eating all that gunk,
 It puts me in a sad funk.
 Then I eat more by the hunk.
 Caring less about fat, calories, or the future size of the junk in my truck!

Angels

Peppermints and Hugs

Ashley Knott

Peppermints and Hugs

The smell of peppermints and tobacco
Would cling to my Grandfather
And all of his clothes.
Every time I'd see him, he'd say,
"I'll give you a peppermint
For a hug and a kiss."

The twists of red and white
On the sweet and minty disk
Reminds me of the smell
Of my Grandfather
And how I'd always try to
Copy the smell by keeping
The peppermints in my pocket
And hugging him so close
That I might get the smell on
my clothes.



2nd place
fiction

Melodies of the Magic Frog

Charlotte L. Spradling

It was another Friday afternoon. Hearing the telephone ring was Ida's cue that six-year-old Bonnie was hoping for an invitation for a weekend visit. If Ida did not respond quickly to her granddaughter's subtle manipulations, Bonnie's patience would exhaust, and she would ask directly.

"Granny, can I come over?"

"What for . . . ?"

"Well, I just wanted to come and see ya for a while—if you ain't busy."

"I'm always busy, child, you know that."

Not to be derailed, Bonnie insisted, "But, Granny, tomorrow's Saturday."

"So what does that mean?"

"Granny, don't fool me. You know it means fishin' day." While Bonnie nervously awaited the answer, she twirled the phone cord in the air over and over and around her finger until it was spent.

". . . well, who said *you're* supposed to go with me *every* Saturday. Besides, me and Papa might not go tomorrow; it looks like rain."

Bonnie's anticipation turned to doubt. Slowly, she mustered the words, "Granny, you know fishin'

ain't the only reason I like to come and see ya."

Sensing the disappointment in her voice, Ida relented. "Yes, I know. Git cha mama to bring you tonight, and you can stay."

"Thanks, Granny, what about fer Sunday? You know I like goin' to church wif ya, too."

"My, you do like to push it, don't ya?"

Innocently, Bonnie asked, "Push what, Granny?"

"Never mind . . . just come on soon as ya can. Maybe we can talk Papa into goin' to Roses' dime store. They ain't nothin' like good ole popcorn and drinks on Friday night, huh Bonnie?"

"That's right, Granny, and ridin' that speckled pony, ya reckon they got him fixed yet—alls it takes is a dime!" Then sheepishly, she added, "I love you, Granny."

"I love you, too, Bonnie."

Ida hung up the phone and went and sat down with her husband. Milton, had an atrophied stature of medium proportion that had wearied from years of abuse at the cotton gin, but even at sixty-eight, his black hair

was only slightly graying. His blue eyes were deep-set and shadowed by fuzzy black eyebrows housed behind large metal-framed bifocals. His earlobes had lengthened over the years, and many times Bonnie would sit in his lap and pull at them, comparing them to rabbits' ears.

Milton and Ida were an excellent complement to each other. Milton still loved and respected his wife, even after forty-eight years of marriage. His easygoing ways, quiet nature, and calm spirit were a good counter to Ida's sharp opinions and brusque temperament. Wherever Ida went, her strong presence and outspokenness always demanded attention, but *only* if one dared to ask. Milton and Bonnie were two of the few people that had the opportunity to enjoy the pleasant side of Ida, a tall, aging woman with her white hair pinned in a bun at the back of her head. In spite of her callous ways, she had sometimes been accused of choosing favorites, Bonnie particularly. Instead of her usual bristling, it was Ida's way to let them think what they wanted where Bonnie was concerned.

It was close to bedtime when Bonnie arrived, too late for popcorn and drinks, but still in time for her and her grandfather's show, *Gunsmoke*. Every Friday night she struggled to stay awake and watch Miss Kitty, her favorite. Tonight, the autumn breezes wafted through the open screened window, vibrating the blinds in a shrill whine. It created a melodic swish . . . swish . . . from the

floating taffeta curtains. The breeze dotted her delicate porcelain frame with sandpaper chills while she lay on the rug at her granny's feet.

"Granny, why's she got that big black mole on the side of her face like that for?" Bonnie asked, referring to Miss Kitty.

"I don't know—they call it a beauty mark, I suppose."

"A beauty mark! Why, Granny, you look better'n her any ole day. . . ." Crawling up from the oval braided rug, Bonnie snuggled into her Grandma's lap, leaned into her face, nose to nose, and whispered, "Even if you do look like Olive Oyl." Laughter burst forth from Milton in an unexpected gush, rolled to the top of the ceiling and back down through the open window; even the flapping taffeta curtains picked up momentum and swished all the louder. Being compared to Popeye's gangly wife was not amusing to Ida.

"Gettin' cold in here, Milton. Shut that window," Ida snapped—not appreciating his and Bonnie's cackles. "Time for bed, Bonnie; go get your bath—you shoulda already had it!"

"Yes, ma'am." With mischievous eyes, Bonnie turned toward her granddaddy, scrunched her shoulders, and squelched her final giggle, then ran down the long hall where more play awaited.

Bonnie loved the old house with its tall ceilings and drafty rooms. She loved the pie safe where leftover home-made biscuits and molasses always kept company with a fresh-

baked pie or chocolate cake. But more than those things, she loved knowing that she was safe here.

Soon, Ida heard the pounding of the running water filling the tub and the slapping and splashing of tiny hands. She could hear Bonnie's bare butt sliding across the base of the porcelain claw-foot tub and waves of water flopping from end to end, splashing Bonnie in her face.

Bonnie lathered herself with a fresh bar of mustard-yellow Dial; she rotated the soap over and over and marveled at how the bubbles changed color from deep yellow to white. Soon she was sparkling clean. Out of the tub she bounded and leaned across the rim of the tub—her hind end smiling at the ceiling. She pulled the chain attached to the rubber stopper and stared at the water tornado until finally, with a belch, it swallowed itself down the drain. Feeling the chill again, she hurriedly put on her pink kitten pajamas, ran down the hall, jumped over the floor furnace, and pounced into her bed in the corner of her grandparent's room.

"Goodnight, Granny, Papa." The tiny voice resonated in the big bedroom with tall ceilings. Each night, until the lights were extinguished, Bonnie gazed upward at the ceiling and counted the lines between slender wooden slats that ran lengthwise across the room.

"We goin' fishin' damarrer, ain't we, Granny?"

Sleepily, Ida gave her usual stiff reply, "We'll see, now go to sleep; don't say no more."

Ida awoke to overcast skies, but flickers of sunshine sporadically appeared through scurrying misty clouds. She determined that it was close enough to call it "fair skies" and wouldn't deny Bonnie her chance to catch a big one.

"I'll catch one bigger'n you today, Granny. I promise I will, I truly promise," echoed Bonnie from the back seat of the big sedan. Quickly, her thoughts changed.

"Granny? Daddy says the world's gonna be ruled by cats, says they gonna take over the world—gonna change everything. I don't know what he's talkin' about, but he says the States is never goin' to be the same if dem cats takes over. He says dey gonna come take our money and give it away. The 'publicans is gonna be lost without 'ice in the hour.' Says we won't stand a chance against dem cats, says them Kennedys are gonna ruin everything. What kinda cats is big enough to do that, Granny? Daddy said they oughta just shoot 'em; but I don't want nobody shootin' my cat. I hid her in the barn before I left. Ya think Miss Kitty'll be safe till I get back?"

Irritated at Bonnie's incessant chatter, Ida turned with a frown, reached across the back seat to brush Bonnie's sweaty brown bangs from her huckleberry eyes, then sharply stated, "Really, Bonnie! He said *Democrats*. They're not cats at all: they're people just like us."

As the light blue Buick made its way down dusty dirt paths to Critchen's Pond, Milton eased the car

up to the self-pay box and put in three dollars, one for each of them. He got out and pulled back the electric fence to allow them access, got back in the car, and slowed it to a crawl. In spite of Ida's complaining about the bumpy ride, he hit a big hole just so Bonnie would squeal with laughter—sometimes he had to show the both of them who was *really* the boss.

By now, sparkling sun had melted the misted skies and caused the tall grass to smell musty and the morning crickets to sing "chirp melodies." Every so often, a slight breeze flavored the air with the gentle fragrance of honeysuckle. It was here, by her Granny's side, that Bonnie felt safe enough to forget the worries of home.

"Look! Look at dem cows," Bonnie exclaimed. "They're inside the fence with us; won't they hurt ya, Granny?"

"Pay you no mind to them cows, girl. They won't bother you, if you don't bother them."

"I don't like 'em, though. They're big!"

"You just stick close to me, ya hear?"

"Yessum."

As usual, the ritual was to part ways when they got to the edge of the pond. Leaving the car in the field, Milton went to the left, Ida and Bonnie to the right. It was an unwritten rule that they were allowed their own fishing space. At least a pole and line distance apart set the boundaries; it went for Bonnie as well.

The tall grass bowed in defeat as they waded through with poles, crickets, worms, Royal Crown colas, and nabs. Ida carried a lidded bucket that served as a seat for her and a new home for the fish they caught.

Cautiously, Bonnie watched the cows flicking their tails and swatting the flies while clinging close to Ida's frumpy calico dress. The faded bonnet that Ida wore shadowed the sun from her intense ivory face. Her large glasses reflected the sun off the water, making her squint. Leaving Bonnie to herself, Ida traveled a short distance ahead.

Bonnie cast her line first; each time it fell too close to the bank causing the minnows to swarm around the bait, pinching tiny pieces, until it disappeared.

"Ya gotta get a little farther out or the minnows are gonna keep stealin' ya bait."

"But Granny . . . I'll fall in!" Bonnie sighed in disappointment as she watched her grandmother pull in fish after fish. "I keep tryin', they just keep gettin' away." Soon frustration overtook her; she plopped on the bank, gathered her flowered dress around her thighs to cool her gangly legs, lay back on beaten-down grass, and turned her freckled face toward the emerald pines.

Watching Bonnie's disappointment, Ida thought that she should coax Bonnie to come closer. She would help her cast further out where there were bigger fish. "There's a frog over here. I bet he knows where to catch 'em. Come and

see!"

Bonnie retorted with firm determination, "No, Granny, I want to catch my own fish!" The noon sun stroked Ida's back and caused fidgeting to set in; her bucket was now full with the evening meal, but she didn't want to leave until Bonnie had caught something worthy.

Bonnie soon grew tired of the pine trees and was up and fishing again. Before too long, Bonnie's frantic shouts stirred the air.

"I got one, Granny, really I did!" Stuggling to pull the big one in, Bonnie pulled the pole with all her strength, until it arched severely. Through the corner of her eye, she saw her grandmother watching from her seat on the bucket.

"I don't need no help! I can get it, really I can!" The fighting fish struggled, the line swayed under the water back and forth. But, not to be outdone, Bonnie backed up until she had drug her worthy catch upon the weeded bank. The fish flopped defiantly in waves of protests, gathering weeds and bits of dirt under its slimy scales.

Ida leveraged herself with her arm against her knee, shifted her stiff body with a jolt, and pulled herself up from the low bucket. She ambled toward the child and examined her prize, questioning whether or not it was the biggest. Ida was relieved that it was and that they would soon be able to leave.

"It ain't the biggest . . ."

"Yes it is, Granny, its bigger'n any you or Papa caught; I'll show ya

when ya fry him up for supper! I tole ya, I tole ya I would catch the biggest 'un!"

"Aw shush!" Ida toyed, as she aimed her tall, bony frame through swarms of grasshoppers and back to the bucket. The giant bream still flailed in her hand. She raised the lid and tossed it in where it splashed against the others, beating them with its massive tail. Settling onto her bucket, Ida resumed her fishing.

In a little while, Ida snickered and again called, "Bonnie, I hear that frog again. Come find him; they say wishin' on a frog makes ya dreams come true."

Bonnie, satisfied with her catch, no longer desired to pull empty hooks from the edge of the water. Again, she sat on the bank, her excitement rapidly waning.

Across the pond, Milton called, "Ida, you and Bonnie bout ready to go?"

Waving her hand, Ida motioned for him to come; she was ready. Milton began tying up his pole.

"Bonnie, I hear that frog again. Come make a wish. Hurry."

Happy that she had caught the biggest fish, Bonnie turned her interest toward the frog. "What kinda frog is it, Granny?"

"It's a big green one, 'round here we call 'em the 'green fog frog.' They croak real loud and hide in the grass near the edge of the water. If ya see him, ya get your wish. Hear him? Can'tcha hear him, Bonnie?" Just as she started toward her Grandma, the frog bellowed again, braaappuh. . .

braaaaaaph . . . puhh . . . puhh. "Hear him, Bonnie—quick, come and see!"

"Yeah, Granny, I hear him, I hear him!" Bonnie yelled in excitement, hoping to get her wish. In her short-gaited run, Bonnie approached the edge of the water near her Granny, still seated on the bucket. Peering over the edge of the bank, while straining for evidence of the fog frog, there was another braaappuh . . . followed by two short puhhs. . .

"I hear him; he sounds like he's hiding under ya bucket!" Bonnie crouched low to catch a glimpse of the illusive frog.

"Brapp . . . puhh. . ." With silver-dollar eyes, Bonnie raised herself quickly and turned in disgust toward her snickering Granny. Quickly backing away, Bonnie slapped the air with her open hands, exclaiming loudly, "Granny, he stinks, he stinks!" Pinching her nose, pulling back and pointing toward her Grandmother, she shouted, "That ain't no frog!"

In loud rolling torrents of laughter, Ida leaned on her upright pole, held her sides, and exclaimed, "That's why we call him the 'fog frog!'"

"No . . ." said Milton, approaching with laughing eyes and his pole in hand, "it's why we part ways when we go fishin'."

Turning forgivingly, Bonnie sighed, "Granny—you always fool me, but I like it anyways. I was only gonna wish that I could live wid you forever."

Soon, they gathered their things, waded back through the carpet of

jumping crickets, loaded the car, and headed home. The ride home was peaceful and quiet. Bonnie's incessant chatter ceased to rule the atmosphere. After a short while, the humming of the motor and the velvet breeze lulled Bonnie to sleep where she dreamed of wishin' on her granny's magic frog.



Logic Has Nothing to Do with It

(a series of quotes)

Ashley Knott

A broken heart dreams
of the myth of monogamy
while cartoon trees
play basketball in the gym.

The world represents perfection and attainment
and the king of cups sits on his throne
as the third chimpanzee
wonders why he's a naked ape.

A good Wif was ther OF beside Bathe.
In comes the playmate that never was seen
then the sharks went mad
and my father ran to catch the reins

We should civilize them with a stick
if men could menstruate.
God answers prayer of a paralyzed child.
"No," says God.

Funnyuns still outselling Responsibilityuns
but my people don't like to have
others think for them
because lieutenants Prackle and Tonder were snot-noses.

It's not easy being male if you have to make sperm
twenty times longer than you are
and a chicken is just an egg's way
of making another egg.

Bullshit, Jesus, those are obviously my footprints.
Be calm then and I'll go ahead
with these trivial tricks of the household
it is easier to make bad out of good than good out of evil.

I am a woman, but I'm not a fool.
The fox knows many tricks,
the hedgehog only one (one good one).
But when did ignorance become a point of view?

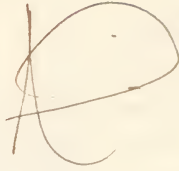
*Tous les événements sont enchaînés dans
le meilleur des modes possibles.**
Now that the conjecture has been proven,
we can call it a theorem.

The opportunities for conflict seem endless,
and where there is no choice all men are friends.

* All events are chained together in the best of all possible worlds.

Angels

Automated Messages



The memory of a mouth that once talked or touched

...We're sorry...

Became birds that betrayed; silence the sound of much.

...you have placed your call from a telephone which has calling restrictions...

And while sneaking away from its two favorite strangers

...or you have dialed a number which cannot be reached.

A lingering nostalgia laughed at its all too often familiar impasse.

The Matchmaker

Melinda S. Kelly

Getting along with family can be difficult on a good day, but I decided a long time ago that it is stupid and downright impossible to argue with my mother because she is a woman who is always right. It is a rare occasion that my mother will admit that she has made a mistake, although she will often tell me that if I make a mistake, I should go ahead and admit it because making mistakes are common and part of what makes us all human.

I say all of this because my mother has made it her mission in life to find me a man. This would not be such a laughable situation if I hadn't had such difficulty getting rid of the first one. Yes, I have been through the dreaded "divorce," and I have lived to tell all about it. My mother has lived through my divorce and has decided to tell almost every single man she finds about it. This should be enough to deter any man trying to date me, especially since it was my mother who introduced me to my ex-husband. Yes, I made the ultimate boo-boo. I married a man whom my mother literally picked out for me, but at least I had enough sense to get

rid of him when I found him in our bed with another woman. However, my mother still thinks that "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." OK, I will be nice and not exaggerate too much. My mother does have three rules that she goes by when finding a "potential date." First, she will not give out my information to any man who is married, engaged, or has a girlfriend; yes, I said give out my information. This will become relevant later as this story progresses. Second, this "potential date" cannot smoke because she hates that my dad smokes, and she does not want me to end up with a smoker. Third, this "potential date" cannot dip snuff or any other kind of tobacco product because she thinks that is just nasty.

There are two particular incidents that happened which finally made my mother admit complete failure when it comes to finding me a "potential date." The most recently painful event was the final one.

My mother has a way of finding people at her job. This is interesting since she works at a hospital. It is not hard to imagine the kind of mentally and physically sick people that she

comes into contact with on a daily basis, and, for some reason, she thinks that she will be able to find the man of my dreams there.

It has been almost a year since my mother met a "nice" man at the hospital. She talked to him long enough to establish that he passed her three criteria; so what does she do? Well, my mother follows the most logical course of action in her mind. She gives this total stranger my home phone number and tells this man to call late because I keep late hours at school.

I have a total stranger call me at eleven at night to ask me for a date. It happened something like this: The phone rings, and I wonder what could be wrong for someone to be calling me. I answer the phone. "Hello?"

"Hi, my name is Donald."

"Yes?" I asked.

"Yes, my name is Donald."

"Yes, and why are you calling me?"

"Your mother gave me your number."

"I'm sorry. Are you sure that you have dialed the correct phone number?" I asked.

"You are Marilyn's daughter? Your mother works at a hospital?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Then I have the right number. Would you like to go out and get to know one another better? I hear that you are looking."

"Excuse me?"

"I hear that you are looking for a man."

At that point, I was in shock. However, something was definitely not right because the voice on the other end of the line sounded oddly muffled and gruff, so I got to the point.

"What else did my mother tell you?" I asked.

He replied, "She said that you were still in school and busy most of the time. It's okay with me that you're in school. I think at our age that we should stay active."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's important to keep ourselves going with activities even if we are getting older."

"Ah, yeah, and exactly how old are you?"

"I'm fifty-nine. Why?"

"Did my mother mention how old I am?"

"No, but I assumed you were older."

"I'm twenty-seven."

"Oh, uh, you're..."

"I'm too young for you is what I'm thinking."

This conversation ended by him abruptly hanging up. I then proceeded to call my mother to find out what her particular problem was, seeing that after the previous incident we agreed that we would leave Melinda's love life alone.

The previous incident that I refer to is another incident where my mother again decided that she would find me a man. She kept telling me how she had met this really cute policeman. He had just been promot-

ed to detective, and he was a friend of one of her coworkers. He broke up with his girlfriend, so now in her eyes he was available, but he dipped. However, she was willing to overlook the fact that he dipped because he was exceptionally cute. She tried her hardest to set up a blind date. This guy was apparently totally heartbroken over his ex-girlfriend, so my mother was forced to let this one go. A week later, we found out that he had been arrested because he was accused of killing his ex-girlfriend in a fit of rage. It was after reading this in the local paper that my mother decided that she would give up the manhunt on my behalf.

It appeared that she had not learned from the last time, so I placed a dreaded phone call to my mom.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Mom, it's me. How are you doing?"

"I'm good. What are you calling this late at night for? Is something the matter?"

"In a manner of speaking. I just got off the phone with a man named Donald. I believe that he is an acquaintance of yours?"

"Yes, he is," she answered.

"Mom, I thought you agreed to no more meddling?"

"He was such a nice man and so articulate. I thought you would appreciate it."

I sighed. "Mom, you have to stop. No more help with this. The man was almost sixty years old. He was old enough to be my father."

"I didn't realize. I thought that he had prematurely grayed," she replied.

"Nope. He's aged the old-fashioned way, year by year. Promise me no more," I demanded.

"I don't see what the harm is, but I will promise to keep you happy."

"Thanks, Mom." I said my good-byes and hung up.

Now, I just wait for the next late-night phone call from the next prematurely graying sixty-year-old who happens to stumble across my mother's path, so my mother can explain about her daughter who is still single.

Angus

drummer in math class

Maulinda Pudo

it's more than a rhythm in my head

the guitar chords sound when

i crash the cymbal.

i tap my foot on the bass drum pedal

and hold the sounds together

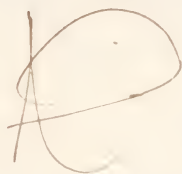
with a net of pulses (like)

my blood pumping, faster

as i set the tempo flailing

and drifting on the song, exploding.

The Last Day of School



Giggle colors.

Sunburst knuckles fraying at the fronts of desktops.

5 Outdoor Equipments, 6 Jansports, and 8 Spaldings (because they were on sale)
—squeezed—

in between forty bouncing knees, twenty stomachs, and sixty-two days.

One hundred and ninety-five fingers fidgeting inside thirty-nine arms
clasping and sitting

at the ready; with sixty-two shakes per minute.

And all of them are waiting;

To release pullback racecar legs

And go blasting through the doors

Into the hallways and bus stops of freedom.

The Haircut

Sharon Johnson



I always dreaded having my hair brushed. As far back as I can remember, my family said I was "tender-headed." I could never master the art of standing perfectly still for the brush-out when the rollicking, jerking hairbrush kept my feet nearly off the floor with each new yank from my mother's swift stroke. I always touched my head after the ordeal was over to make sure it was still where it used to be. My mother would wet my hair with the brush while she started spinning the hair around her fingers for those infamous spit curls, securing them into the flesh of my head with the bobby pins. I was never convinced whether the wetness in the brush came from the glass of

water nearby or if she really did spit in my hair. I figured that the "spit" part was only for people who did not have a glass of water. We did.

She started pushing her bobbypins into my head, as if it were the cloth tomato by her sewing machine. I was sure that all the bobby pins were missing the rubber tips that were supposed to keep them from poking. She ignored my cries of pain and pleas for her to let me brush it, instead making me stand as still as time while she yanked and poked and formed the spit curls. So, every morning of my hair-pulled life, my mother forced my long straight hair into the bobby pins that would transform it first into curls, and, lastly, into Shirley Temple ringlets.

Every morning I begged her not to make ringlets and to let me have a pixie haircut. When you are four years old, no one seems to care about the way you want your hair. I am not sure I understood fashion or hairstyles, but I did understand that if my hair was short, it would not be possible to pin into the painful, dreaded curls. I watched my older sister get trims and haircuts like "bobs." Was

she lucky! She never had to get the ringlets. I remember wishing my hair was as short as hers and wishing I had a poodle skirt. She got to wear the cute clothes, and I got to wear the gathered-waist homemade gingham and dotted swiss cottons like Dorothy wore in *The Wizard of Oz*. The entire association of the frilly can-can dress, patent leather shiny shoes, and ringlets pinned so tightly that my eyes crossed only made me wish I could be invisible, somehow. I just wanted to click my heels three times and get away from home. Life could have been good if only I never had to have my hair pinned into curls again. That's when I formulated a plan to get my hair cut.

From the observations of my sister's home haircuts, I figured out how the scissors worked. I knew the drawer where the scissors were stored in the dresser. I only had to wait for the right moment. While all the family members were occupied, I could take matters into my own hands and tame this hair. From the privacy of the back bedroom, I slithered across the worn, wooden floor toward the old dresser. Its drawers slid gently along the metal railing underneath, exposing the precious instrument of deliverance. Once the scissors were in hand, nothing could prevent my plan from succeeding.

The scissors flew into action, almost on their own cognizance. Zealously, I started to give myself the pixie haircut. Just above the left eye, the scissors snipped. More hair fell over the right eye, so I changed sides.

"Get it out of your eyes," I was thinking. "It has to get higher than your eyebrows because you have to see the front of your face up there." Stretching a little farther up, I placed the scissors even with my scalp. "This feels like it is in the right place," I thought, as I closed the handles of the scissors. A long, uneven chunk of hair fell across my face. "I can see. Great, this works! The hair is gone. Is the other side supposed to be like that? Let me see if I can reach the other side. If I bend my arm like this and get really close to the mirror, I can see better," I was thinking. Snip, snip! More hair fell, but it did not seem just right. Maybe snip a little farther over. Maybe if I climbed up onto the dresser and got closer to the mirror where I could see better, I could bend my arm as my sister did and it would reach the other part of my head. "Part the hair first, like when they part it for church. Feel of your head, then pat the top. Yes, your head is still in place. Don't jerk it though, like Mother does; it could come off. Get a little closer, bend over. Snip, snip the longer hair on the side of the ear. There, the long hair is gone from your shoulder." Was that my ear? Uh-oh, the scissors fell from my fingers.

The hardwood floor sent a resounding thud into the next room. In dashed my sister, who displaced me from the dresser and yelled, "Sharon's got the scissors and ruined her hair."

My older sister, Geneva, with her short, stylishly cut hair was "telling" on me.

"Geneva Anne, I hope your hair grows long and mother brushes it and the scissors get lost from the drawer," my thoughts screamed, while my lips trembled in fear and silence. My sister recovered the scissors from me as if they were only hers and returned them to their proper place in the dresser drawer. Meanwhile, my grandmother, whom I called Mama Johnson because she cared for me most of my life, was croaking from her pad on the sofa, "O Lord, she's going to put her eye out!" Unlike my sister, who was concerned for her scissors, my grandmother was concerned about my safety with a real mother's love. My patient grandmother, still on the couch, rose to the occasion only with words: "What in the world did you do to your hair, Sharon?" By this time my mother had arrived on the scene, angry at being called away from her chores in the kitchen and fully intending to make the culprit who did this pay.

Standing before my mother, I dangled my hands and tried not to squirm. The hands were the guilty ones who did this deed, and I wished they could hide from her view. Unable to flee from her wrath, I held one hand down on top of the other to make it be still. There was nothing to do but face the head poker, so I had to be brave. With one firm spin, my mother slung me from the bedroom to the living room, where I landed on the sofa. The room was small, and the sunlight shot through the open curtains like wooden stakes seeking the heart of a vampire. Under the scrupu-

lous inspection of my mother, the damage to my hair seemed irreparable. She was squeezing my face like an orange with one hand while she assaulted my injured head with the damned hairbrush. I wondered if my twisted face was as red as hers was.

The yanks began on the short, scalped bangs. No effort she made lengthened them. Under pretensions of regret, I attempted to seem teary and scared. Secretly, I was glad the altered hairs would no longer discipline themselves into her infamous spit curls. My mother attempted to straighten out the gaping crevices among the bangs as best she could. My scalp-cut resembled an early predecessor of the mohawk, and the gaps were still gaping at Mother. It gave me a bird's eye view of the world, and it gave my mother a testy twitch in her flushed cheek.

The Shirley Temple ringlets, Mother's favorite for Sunday mornings, were now a creation of the past. Blinking stray hairs from my eyes, I considered the result deserving of the shame and suffering I had to endure—I had the pixie haircut I wanted. The long, straight hair that had caused my neck to be snatched and pulled like the bobbing doll that was magnetically attached to the dash of my brother's 1969 Malibu was gone. For the rest of the year, I was free from jerks, yanks, bobbypins, spit, hairbrushes full of cold water, and Shirley Temple ringlets. My hair was short and cut and wonderful. Who knew that it would grow back?

Last Falling of the Sun



In my backyard I sat covered by the stars
with a pen in my hand, a blank sheet of paper
and a whole lot of wind.

Things were on my mind that would never come again.
Things that came to disagree and some that came to beg.

Wind that blew the smoke away,
things that ran and hid in the shadow of a thought,
or things that smiled and said to you, "Yes, I can be bought."

"Balance," my friend said to me, "is the peaceful way to bliss."
Night and Day laughed and said,
"Who gave the answer to those two kids?"

When darkness came and reared its head,
the light began to fall.
The leaves were crisp and water chilled the soul.

"Balance," she said to me, "is the answer to the rest."
A rest, I wanted to say to her, is far from what was best.

The stump in the yard that used to be
a tree that stood tall and proud,
now is just my seat.
"The rest," it said, "is what it offers me."

"Belief," she said to me, "is often the way to truth."
But truth was just a moment hanging on a string
That blew in winds of love,
but not winds of distancing.

The clouds on the horizon
made an evening strong
A time to smile and sigh
after the evening's gone.

Angus

For U

Laurence C. Ungli.

In a perfect world me and you can share the things that lovers share, the pain that lovers bare and exemplify the care that lovers care, but instead I continuously stare...out the window into a world that is not fair.

Why didn't we meet at an earlier date, then you could be my mate. If I could turn back the hands of time I'd forever wait.....to hold you in my arms, to drown you in my charm, and together we could weather the storm.

But don't get me wrong, I love her and you love him and I understand that, but still remains the fact...that I Love You.

I have a vivid imagination of what our lives could be, but there are many factors that make it hard for you and me. There are many factors that keep us apart, but I care for you so much that I can settle for us living in the dark. Just always know that you will forever be in my heart.

Until my dying day I hope we can at least communicate to where we at least say hello over the phone and see how each other is doing. But before I part I would like to share my vision with you:

My Vision

You and I, hand and hand, in a faraway land sharing passion and romance as we forever dance the night away. And with a quick grasp, I aggressively, but comfortably pick you up and take you to the place where we lay and make love to you the way love has never before been made.

A night of divination as our bodies twist and turn and our passions burn, our bodies continuously yearn for each other because this is not just sex.

It is an intertwining of two people whose souls have created a melody of perfect harmony. Something so powerful, it's as if we've moved mountains and created new ground. A night so powerful that it could satisfy a person for a lifetime.

The Old Natchitoches Courthouse

Teri Murphy

*Previously published in *The Old Natchitoches Parish Magazine*.

When my grandmother, Jo, was eight years old, her father became Deputy Sheriff of Natchitoches Parish. He moved his family into the new Natchitoches Courthouse, since being a jailer was one of his duties. Jo would live on the jail floor of the courthouse for the next five years. "One of the first things I learned to do really well was to fingerprint, and when I was at Girls' State they elected me Sheriff of the parish and later Attorney General as a result." Jo never thought of the courthouse as anything but home. The place was a little foreboding because of the deep gray walls combined with the windows covered with bars. There was little decoration, even in the apartment she remembered living in. "It was awesome to a child at that time. I have never seen so much gray in my life; the walls were gray, the ceilings were large and gray, but I was never really scared."

At that time in the 1950s, there was no television, and as an only child, she would play around the outside, roller-skating and bicycle riding. The roller-skating ended rather soon, for Jo wasn't able to stop or brake

very well. As a result, she would land on her butt at the curb or sometimes go right out into the street before she could stop. Since the police department was right across the street, the chief of police told Jo's father about her mishaps, and the skates abruptly disappeared soon after.

Jo's apartment shared the same floor with the jail cells, a fingerprinting room, a hospital, a large kitchen, and a door that opened to thirteen steps leading down to the hanging, or execution, room. Jo describes her apartment as one long room with two beds, a living room couch, a large bathroom on the side, and a very large closet. There was no kitchen in the apartment, and the dining room was located outside in the hallway. The family ate the same food that the cook prepared for the inmates. Jo mentioned that there were always people around, and it was more like a small extension of the Natchitoches community. It was common for people to get a ride in one of the two police cars, come over to the courthouse to eat, do some shopping, and have the Sheriff take them back home

again that evening.

Jo remembered one Christmas when her father was late getting home. Her mother went and opened all of the cells, letting the prisoners out for Christmas dinner. Jo's father was extremely upset to come home and find all the prisoners out partying and eating. "Do you realize that they could have killed the both of you!" he said to Jo's mother. But Jo and her mother never felt that there was any danger.

"It is Christmas, Elgie," my grandmother replied.

At the time, the courthouse was less than five years, and the death penalty had been repealed. There had not been a single execution ever recorded at this new facility. As a result, there were no scary tales to tell, no ghost stories about the violent death of an inmate, and so the hanging room acted more as a playroom and storage facility. The lever to activate the floor drop was locked and had never been used. At the top, over the rung where the rope was to be tied, was a sort of sun window, and Jo found out that if she piled enough boxes together, she was able to crawl out of that window onto the roof outside. Evidently, this impressed one of the trustys, because after donning her father's winter Stetson and stealing an ostrich feather from her mother's hat to accent it, the trusty piled up boxes one winter evening and made his escape in style. Since the police department and the fire department were right across the street, it didn't take long for the prisoner to be spot-

ted. Before the man reached the ground, the police called Jo's father and said, "Elgie, I think you better have a look outside." The prisoner had tied a bunch of sheets together and was hanging from the window. He was unceremoniously escorted right back to his cell, ending his trust as a trusty.

There was another trusty that Jo remembered fondly, renamed Alvin, for this purpose. Alvin was a big African American, and he would play Frankenstein for the girls who came to Jo's slumber parties and slept on a number of unused beds in the hospital quarters. Alvin was kind enough to lend his criminal talents by letting the bloodhounds practice chasing his scent through the woods. Alvin also fed the dogs, so it was unlikely they would ever bite him. Jo's father, Papa, would take Alvin and the bloodhounds out every now and then to allow everyone some exercise.

Jo mentioned that most of the inmates were incarcerated for petty theft and things like moonshining. The Sheriff and his deputies would go out in the woods, find the stills, dismantle and destroy them, and then have a "tasting" back at the courthouse. The prisoner named Alvin had been given a short sentence and, upon release, broke into a store to get money. He immediately returned to the courthouse, presenting the stolen money to Jo's father while telling him he wasn't quite ready to leave yet. Things had been good for him because he had an open

lock and could leave his cell, was able to eat good food, and didn't have to work. Jo's father promptly arrested him, and things went back as they were for Alvin.

There were holding cells for the more dangerous criminals, and Jo describes walking to the end of the large kitchen where there were double doors with bars that could slide across to cover them. When the door was open, it revealed a very large room with cell doors on each side and small openings for sliding plates of food to the prisoners. There was a panel in the center of the room that, once unlocked, lifted to reveal a kind of combination lock to open all of the cell doors. Jo had complete access to every place in the courthouse, and as long as her friends didn't disturb anyone, they were free to play wherever they wanted.

Jo remembered the times she and her father would take a prisoner down to Angola State Prison, and she recalled that she *was* scared of that place. She remembered tall fences with guard posts, which were gunned, and she never left the car while my grandfather was there to take care of prisoner exchange. She mentioned long, dark green boxes that were almost like coffins lying in the prison yard that were used to punish prisoners. The boxes had no obvious holes and were barely big enough for an adult man to fit in. She remembered how hot it was those days with the heat and humidity. She couldn't imagine that someone was locked up in that box, sweating

with little room and almost no air.

Jo was a good girl and never got into much trouble, but she liked to ride the elevators a lot. My grandfather would slip a matchbox between one of the elevator doors, causing it to stop wherever it was at the time. He didn't keep Jo in there for a long time, but she got the message that she was playing with it too much. There was also a buzzer located downstairs and one in the apartment. In case of a problem, someone could buzz the apartment from downstairs, letting the family know they should evacuate immediately. Jo remembers bragging to her friends about what she would do if the infamous buzzer ever went off. To play a trick on her, my grandfather waited till she was taking a shower and then buzzed the room. Jo remembered being stunned and afraid, but she could not make herself leave the bathroom. Papa came upstairs and told her, "Jo, don't you know you are supposed to take the stairs and get out of the building when that buzzer sounds?" Jo couldn't help but be embarrassed.

As for the outside of the courthouse, Jo said that where the First Baptist parking lot is, there was nothing but a couple of acres of woods. She said her friends, both boys and girls, would build forts and play in there. She said that down by the city pool was an entrance to the city sewer system and that she and her friends would go into the sewer and play. It wasn't like a culvert; you could actually go under the streets of Natchitoches standing up, which was

much like a maze. Jo said they would go to the end and race back to the entrance. Whoever got there first might have firecrackers, and they would throw them back into the sewer. "It was just as loud as a cannon in there, and we didn't ever want to be the last ones out."

There were only two movie theaters at that time, the Cane Theater, which was relatively new, and the "Amuse You" Theater, where the Don Theater was on Front Street. On Saturdays, both movie theaters always showed the westerns Lash LaRue, Gene Autry, and pre-John Wayne cowboy movies. Jo said that when the Sheriff lost his position, her father ran for Sheriff but came in second. That would be the end of their stay at the courthouse and the end of my grandfather's interest in the police department. Jo said that they always knew living at the courthouse was a transition, though she was happy living there. "It was home, and though sometimes it was fun to say I lived there, it was just the place where we lived."

My Friends' Concern As I Left For Honors College

Nicholas G. Guly

They warned me about the dangers of blackface academia:
A vaudeville minstrel show where we all
shrink to the size of banana cream pies and then bloom
into giant caricatures of ourselves,
the real us lost in the clown suit of our ideology, philosophy,
our "world view" if you will,
faces reduced to drama mask contortions—
Comedy if Kerry wins, tragedy for religion
They all thought I would come home smoking cloves
and preaching Nietzsche.

But in my experience, I've found a sort of balance:
Not everyone loses their identity or their Southern Baptist roots.
There are virgins and Republicans eating lunch
with the existentialists. (Study groups bring them together,
but nothing bonds like bad food)
People wax metaphysical, but they also take walks in the rain.
And although I've smoked a clove,
I still think Nietzsche is a moron.

So if back home they don't mind the new smell on my jacket,
I'll excuse their ignorance of Epicurean imperialism,
and we can all reconnect over dinner *chez moi*.

Stains of Rebellion in a Dirty Sink

Kimberly Bhammer

I looked at myself in the mirror. White, mottled spots of toothpaste, remnants of a sloppy brushing job, distorted my view. "Am I really about to do this?" I asked myself. Hell yeah! But what would my parents think? Doubts started worming their way through the maze of my conscience. My parents had given birth to me, they had to love me and accept me as their daughter no matter what I did, right? Parents are supposed to love their children through thick and thin. So what if they received a call from me at three in the morning needing to be bailed out of the slammer I had been thrown into for smoking pot out of a coke can behind the movie theater with some Rastafarian named Domingo. And why should they care if I wrote a letter home telling them that I'd fallen in love...with someone of the same sex.

Okay, so those events never took place, I've not yet been to jail, and I love men, but I have done plenty of things that have probably caused my conservative parents some near

coronaries. This was bound to be one of those times. My image from the mirror continued to stare at me. This girl, this plain, ordinary face was reassuring me. I needed a change, and tonight, in this gloomy cell of a dorm room, that change was going to occur. How would I begin? I was a virgin to the deed that I was about to do and I wanted to perform well! The first thing I needed was space. However, this dimly lit hole of a room didn't provide me with much room. The bathroom sink and mirror were built into the rooms themselves, not the bathrooms. What was the purpose of this? I don't care how friendly one is with one's roommate, there was no way that I was going to get up in the morning, grab a washrag, and scrub my nether regions with my living partner snoring and drooling two feet away from me. So, picture it, a bathroom sink and a bathroom mirror in a bedroom.

I needed room on the dirty sink to perform my outlandish deed. However, my roommate seemed to be collecting as many bottles of

lotions and other unnecessary girly crap as she could.

The sink was littered with half-used bottles of products ranging from Fairy Foot Scrub, for funky feet I assumed, to Orgasmic Orange Body Gel. Why does one need such products? I quickly picked up the thousand and one bottles and littered them onto Katie's pretty pink Winnie the Pooh comforter. How did I end up with someone so incredibly effeminate? Someone in housing had surely been high when they paired up a chain smoker who likes to listen to punk rock while she studies with Miss Pretty Princess who prisses around campus like she owns it and whores it up at places like the Pinnacle each week, religiously.

I now had enough room to attempt to work my magic. This escapade had been thought out and was organized. Any tools that were necessary to complete the job were already laid out on my tiny desk, which was unattractively covered in faux wood contact paper, I might add.

I needed my surgical gloves, first. Protection is always important, from sex to car insurance, and those protective gloves were important to me in this situation. Only, they were nowhere to be found. Could I continue, or should I just give up? Inspirational aphorisms popped into my young mind. "Go west young man;" "be all that you can be;" "just say no." The higher being had given me my answer. I

was to go on with my devious activity as scheduled. I grabbed the main ingredient from my contact-papered desk and began squeezing the cool substance into my hands. It felt as if toothpaste and Vaseline had conceived a child, and this was it.

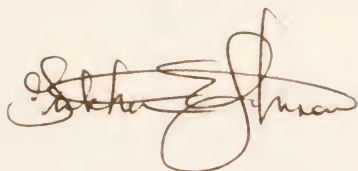
Onto my scalp, into my hair, onto my face and neck the goo was spread. Okay, so I had done it! All that I had to do was wait, right? Carelessly I wiped my hands off on Katie's precious pink glittered hand towel. It looked as if I had wiped up the remnants of a deadly Smurf explosion. She was sure to kill me! But, wait, what's worse is that my hands seemed to be transforming into large blueberries. I considered leaving school and traveling to Vegas to join the Blue Man Group for about two seconds. Not a problem though, right? I mean, it's got to wash off sooner or later. I needed to relax. I needed to take a deep breath. I needed a cigarette. With my blue hands, I shakily pulled my lucky cigarette from my half-full pack. Who cares if I wasn't down to my last cigarette, I still needed that lucky one! With a quick peek out my door, I opened the small window in my fourth-story room, stood on the avocado green desk chair from 1972, leaned my head out the porthole, and took the first, and the best, drag off of that cigarette.

A few minutes went by, and with an automatic flick of my butt, I leaned my head back into the

room and stood in front of the mirror to prepare for the unveiling. It was now or never. I bent down into that dirty sink and washed the Cookie Monster colored goo from my previously golden locks. Before I snuck a look, I quickly covered my hair with a towel. With a deep breath I glimpsed at my masterpiece! The most outstandingly perfect electric blue hair shone brightly in my reflection. I was in love! Who wouldn't be able to resist me, a small stick of a girl who now had short, electric blue spikes for hair?

Well, I quickly found that most men were able to resist me; however, I was a favorite for many of the most aggressive lesbians that this institution has to offer. What had I accomplished? My room was a mess of scattered hair products and bottles of crap such as Amy's Itchy Armpit Scrub. My anal retentive roommate's favorite towel looked as if it had either Papa Smurf's piss or Grover's cum smeared onto it, my hands looked like squished berries, and my parents were going to want to strangle me. I realize that I have many stories of my misspent, misbehaved youth. But, really, what could be more fun than the first time that you piss your parents off by dying your hair? The rebelliousness will wash out of me sooner or later.

Disentangle

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sakha Johnson', with a large, sweeping flourish that loops under the name.

I had nothing to say
it had drifted away at the first distraction
as if my words
with my mind
had run away
with their imagination
and I wished someone would tell me
what the great idea was.

You can't force something to reveal
its self
if all the muscles are tight.
A roly-poly can't unwind under pressure—
the cold of not seeing light will seem warm to unopened eyes.

68

#68

Name

Dr. J. K. L. L.

Age

Address

Date

Rx

the doctor prescribed alcohol
when i chose what i wanted to hear.
too much diet and exercise
is bad for the heart and blood
he said.

eat more sugar and
saturated fats

more cigarettes, preferably unfiltered.
casual sex prevents infection.

pickling is preservation
so that liver will last for years.
fine health, he said. fine health
and insurance will cover the bill.



Out to Dry

John M. H. H.

Argus



Leaf

Blake Bennett

3rd place
Photography



Snacktime

[Handwritten signature]

Angus

2nd place
Photography



Letdown

Chad M

1st place
Photography



Silhouettes

Chad Moore

Angus



Streetsigns

July Sanyo



Untitled

Miguel A. Bobadilla

Angels



"A Moment in Time"

A Moment in Time

Will McDowell

Nocturne

"In the real dark night of the soul it is always
three o' clock in the morning, day after day."

-F. Scott Fitzgerald

Argus

Ember of poets (the atomic era)

Shirley

Ember of poets
(the Atomic era)

Burn up the
Dark of night

Between drunken lips
Spin easy language.

Tiths of Dionysus
Birth the flame
of poets

Looking into the
right

We fight the world
on fire
Burn

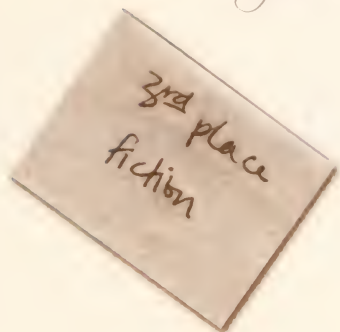
The Passion
of great fire
Dancing from her
lower lips

She licks the
Drunken tongue

My Apocalypse
Speaks like mushroom clouds
I blind my own
Eyes and burn
Shadows
Into my landscape
Dream me a
new dream leave me
the desert moon
I am hungry for a
New Idea
To help regurgitate
my black eyes

Light Like Hope

Nicole Gault



It was dark where we stopped to talk—dark like chocolate, or maybe like charcoal. We sat heavy and warm underneath a tree that shaded us from even more darkness. The only significant source of light I remember was the flame from your lighter that lit up your face for a brief, flickering moment. After that, it was just the pumpkin-orange glow from the end of your cigarette, and that didn't illuminate much.

"What happened to you?"

"I gave up."

For a while, all I could see was the smoldering ember that weaved in and out of the blackness with your gestures, an eerie accompaniment to the speech you were giving. A curl of smoke drifted near my face, and you stretched your arm away to divert it, probably the most sensitive thing you've ever done for me. As my eyes began to adjust to the night, I could make out your silhouette and the contours of your face.

"Do you ever look people in the eye when you talk to them?"

"No."

With the flash, the glow of your

first cigarette gone, you reached immediately for another. The sky seemed to yawn with too much heat for October, and it felt like one or both of us might melt away into the darkness. I focused on your face when I spoke, hoping to make out some detail when you inhaled.

"I love you."

"I don't know what love is."

Your eyelids lifted then, and for the first time our eyes met, locked. I could see the tiny white glint in their corners, like pearls in an inkwell. It didn't last long—a few seconds—and then your head was in your hands, shivering or laughing or crying.

"I know you don't believe in it."

"I never said I don't believe in it; I said I don't know what it is."

We started walking back, and I could see you clearly now. My eyes fully acclimated, I saw a dark form—dark like chocolate, or maybe charcoal. You would have been totally black if it weren't for a faint glow seeming to radiate from your chest—pumpkin-orange, like the burning end of a cigarette. I followed it out of the shadows, and all the way to my car.

Angus

On Being in Bars



I

"When my beer gets here, it'll be perfect"
is what I was thinking of writing before the pink
shirt laid it on the bar perfectly perfect.
"the money, yes, that's what you want"
to smiles and a quick hand with the cash.

When drunk screams crash cars
A bar room glass requiem.

For the death of the drunk poet
The prophet of desecrated bathrooms
Shit-stained sanctuaries praying to Dionysus
Her wines and ways are bartenders smiles
Tender bars of blues notes beckoning my thirsty tongue

Screaming the our father into fields of globbed paint
Van Gogh's ear dreams new suicides for the smiles of the young

Pour me, in glass cups, beer for stomach ulcers
And the pain of her tedious smile.
A soft hand around green bills
Grinning forefathers handing me addiction
Another smoke in the ashtray

II

When womanly feet leave footsteps
Black heel print on my pupil
I know the vision of her legs
Pele burns grooves for lead to
Melt the curve of her containment
Jam box Gibralters rock, leave
Me a cold cell block to melt
My fast-blooming passion

Petals pink with youth
Can you smell the sin of a young tongue
Taste buds of the banished fruit
Nurse my eye a new life
That I may see past the evasive forest
Leaves lack follow the leg back to the root
Her red containment
Lonely tables are a primitive math
Adding up to an absence inside
Chest cavities leave my language rotting...
It's my first kill, I take it smiling
With a bloody face.

III

I remember the bullet
Screaming from the barrel.
A fire gritted through teeth
Pulling itself into my face
Leaving my shadow waiting
For the noontime dance.
It's a new age of suicidal self machines.
Laugh, laugh and cry the melody of uncertainty.

Moving On

by: Asher Daigle

The nights are always the worst.

Turning down the cold, pale lilac comforter, Lizzie climbs into her cold bed and snuggles with cold sheets and cold, stuffed critters, exhaling deeply and somewhat loudly for the end of the day. She blows out all the trapped worries into the air and watches as they shimmer like little fireflies, only they aren't nice like fireflies, and she only wishes they would go away. Her light brown hair spreads over her matching lilac pillowcase, careful not to overlap his side of the bed. She remembers how he hated her hair wrapped around his clean white pillow. She hugs his pillow, wrapping her arms around it as if she were holding him. Breathing all her worries back in deeply, she catches a faint whisper of his scent as it curls silently up her nostrils and into her brain, leaving gentle trails on her mind. His memory floats into her vision, and for a brief moment, he's there again, promising never to leave. But, he did. She smiles, tears running down her pale cheeks. She knows he was there, consoling her fears, even if the only proof is the unfurling of a foreign cologne and the invisible scorches where his touches are burned into her skin. *How long has it been?*

"Come back to me." She sobs into the empty room, tears dripping from her large, green eyes, but there is

no reply, only the sound of a stray dog chasing a cat in a garbage pail across the dark alley and the smell of something rancid, probably from the trash, drifting in. "Without you, I can't take these nights."

In the daylight, she can smile and chat and pretend that he'll be there when she gets home. He'll be waiting with a romantic candlelight supper, and they'll sit on the rug by the space heater. He'll tell her all about his last trip to India or Africa as they sip French chardonnay and cuddle close to savor the warmth they can find only in each other.

But at night, she comes home, and he's not there. There is no meal, and the only other warm body is her overweight gray tabby curled up on her old-fashioned wooden rocker. The cat purrs and rubs against her legs until she carries him into the kitchen for his dinner. She gives him canned tuna and liver, and settles for a bologna sandwich, after lifting the meat to her face to check the age.

"This doesn't smell bad." Lizzie smiles as she surveys her tidy apartment. "Must be the litter box," she shrugs. After that, it's a quick shower and then off to bed with a novel. Novels are the only things that can keep her semi-entertained nowadays. Fantasy-land is the only place where she can forget that he's gone, so she scours book after book looking for an

imaginary lover to take the place of the one that has left her. She opens her books to the same pages every night, thumbing through and trying to stay focused on the words, but they fade just as quickly as she can read them. At the end of the pages she lets the book fall to the floor, trying to hold on to her daydream, but he disappears and she's still alone, only the nightmares visit now.

The lonely nights are *always* the worst.

The days march on at work, but no one knows that he's gone or that he was ever even there at all. Lizzie is loathed and loved by all her co-workers, but not one knows where she lives or what she goes home to find. She never leaves work early anymore. Sometimes it's nine before she leaves the garage, slowly trudging her way toward her apartment. All that's left for her at home now is a fat, lazy cat and a cold stove. So, she avoids it. She drives around in her ancient blue Camry until she's out of gas and then fills the tank just to drive it home.

When he lived with her, she felt complete. There was a sense of perfection that she wouldn't believe could end. *All good things come to an end. So that's all there is to it. I really don't need him. I don't . . . yes, I do. The pretty things are gone now.* She used to think of pretty things. Long flowery phrases used to pour out of her soul while he wrote them into her notebooks. She would shape them later, but when she thought of them, all that she could do was let him write for her. That's what she did: she wrote. Nine books were published and sold with his help. Four months

ago, when he left, the words stopped, all of them. She didn't speak to anyone for a month, not even her parents. She was too scared and tortured to speak. Every morning she went to work, every morning the same thing—without words. She let the answering machines take all her calls and relied on the old-fashioned typewriter on her desk as her only companion.

No one at work cared. They didn't even notice. She came in early, ate lunch alone, didn't take breaks, and left late. The pictures in her tiny cubicle disappeared, even the ones without him. Pictures of Milo, the cat, were untacked and hidden, along with the olive-toned man holding him. *No more thinking about him.* The pictures were picked up for the safety of her sanity and stored for some rainy day, someday in the real rain, instead of the artificial one that dampens her cheeks when she's alone.

Her lonely nights are always the worst.

She watches the plasma lightning outside the dirty window as it mixes with the rain. Strangely attracted to the light, she steps over the lump of dirty clothes in her otherwise neat and very red living room to go to the windows and fling them open. Milo meows and rubs himself on the pile of clothes, looking up at her with his huge yellow-green eyes. She shakes out of her foreign trance and quickly shoos him away from the pile.

"Get out of there. . . and don't look at me like that. It couldn't be any other way, and you know it. He told me he had to go. What the hell was I

supposed to do? I couldn't just let him leave." The sobbing starts now, collapsing her body into a crumbled, tangled mess on the floor. She's talking to Milo now, and she doesn't care if it seems strange. He's the only one who cares anymore. He loves her even if Paul didn't. The rain pours in the window and stains the burgundy carpet in darker shades as her make-up stains her cheeks gray. Shivering, she pulls herself to her feet and tugs down on the window panes. They start to stick, but she forces them closed, slamming them into the sill. "And that's enough of that. We don't like the rain anymore. Okay, Kitty?" She turns on her heel and deliberately steps through her pile of clothes to get to her bedroom to change.

Her lonely, stormy nights are always the worst.

"The lipstick follows the earrings and the necklace in depressed ritual, then, the rest of the make-up. The dress is always followed by the stockings and garters, and the shoes go last." She sits at her vanity table outlining her wardrobe to Milo as she completes each task. The pale face in the mirror smiles as the face inside cringes with fear. Tonight would be the last night she would live in such pathetic depression. "You know, Milo, depression is only good for one thing," she smiles down at the cat, who is sitting on his haunches at her feet. "More depression. That's all I've been feeling, but no more. It's time to stop the cycle once and for all." The last words become muffled as she slips the fire-engine-red dress over her head. Sweeping her hair into a simple up-do, she slips on the tall

heels that she has pulled out to match her dress. *One last drink before I go.* She returns to the kitchen and pours herself a glass of Merlot out of the crystal decanter on her tiled island. "Here's to you, lover." She raises the glass in a mock toast as she lets the fiery liquid scorch its way down her throat.

Her drunken and lonely stormy nights are always the worst.

* * *

Detective Stoker steps out of the elevator and into the small apartment. A large gray tabby cat is curled in the arms of his assisting officer, Lieutenant Morgan. It meows loudly as he walks over to the coroner. A petite brunette lies sprawled on the floor, a wine glass held lightly in her fingertips.

"What's this?" he asks nonchalantly in the way that cops do.

"Suicide-Homicide." The detective takes a step back from the smell. "He's been gone for more than a couple of months . . . her . . . maybe two days. He was covered in that pile of clothes. Cause of death appears to be poison for both." The coroner finished his report and handed the clipboard to Stoker, who looked over it briefly and handed it back.

"Case closed. She got her revenge on him for whatever. Wrap this up and get it out of the neighbor's way. He's been complaining to the super about the smell for two months." The detective picks up the cat and rubs its collar as he walks slowly to the elevator. "Depression does funny things to people, Lieutenant Morgan. In this town everyone's got an issue." He turns and steps into the elevator before sinking slowly out of sight.

End Term

Edward M. Brauer

I sit, fingers stained
yellow teeth, nicotine kiss.
I, bloodshot griping,
Gripping the keys,
Stoic victim of an end term
phrase phase.
Smoke whirls, swirls,
Caresses my face, lungs, dry
eyes. What would it matter
if I substitute one word for
a placebo.
I turn my mind
out onto the page
I turn away from
the dying, gasping sense of
duty, chivalry, self
delusion. Blind.
Transcribing mute thoughts
as bass, rumbling, quaking
rocks, grimy in my head.
Today or tomorrow I finish
to spend more time working
because it relieves
and relaxes. Soothes.

Angels' Tears Turn Blue in Silence

Daughter Zary

I bought a harmonica late one morning. It was a German-made "Hohner," shining steel with artful engravings accenting its style. It was new and bright, and I could see the reflection of my face on its mirror-like metallic surface.

The music shop man said, "This is the best one we got; I think you'll really like its tones."

He was right—I did.

I had never played the harmonica before, but from the second I pressed its cold metal casing to my lips, I knew that this instrument had great potential. The sounds it produced were crisp and clear. Once the steel warmed up, it almost became like an extension of my own body. Unlike other instruments—such as the guitar, piano, or drums—the harmonica is small, and you have to pull it in tight. You can have it in your pocket forever and hardly know it's there. It is like a companion that can transform your emotions into song.

I thanked the man for his help in picking out the instrument and paid in cash. As I walked towards the exit of the store, I held the harmonica tightly in my hand. Then, as I neared

the door, I slid it into my jacket. You see, I was all dressed up that day and had on my best coat and a tie. The harmonica fit snugly inside the pocket of my blue blazer, right under my left breast, below my heart. The instrument was now silent, but I felt its cool metallic form now enclosed in the darkness of my garment.

I got into my car and drove away from the music shop. A Willie Nelson song was playing on my stereo. I could hear the harmonica in the background, its resonance merging with Willie's voice and a nylon-stringed guitar. The album I was listening to was not really my own. I had taken it from my grandfather's collection the day before. I didn't steal it, though, because it was, in fact, an inheritance. The reason I was so formally dressed on that day was because I had a funeral to attend, my grandfather's funeral.

I arrived at the cemetery at 12:30 p.m. My parents were waiting there with my aunt, uncle, and cousins. Soon, several of my friends showed up and gave me pats on the back and words of comfort and support. Altogether there were about sixty

people. My now-widowed grandmother was amongst the throng of the family. She was tearful but strong, as a matriarch should be. Everyone seemed to be expressing the exact same sentiment of loss. They all were asking themselves, "Why did this have to happen?"

The cemetery was private—the land belonged to my grandmother's kin. It was a secluded place, up a stone stairway and down a brick-laid path. The live oaks grew large there. They dominated the periphery of the ivy-laden stonewalled park. Their branches stretched over the plots, shielding them from the weather and the decay of time. Spanish moss hung from the great trees' limbs and occasionally graced the surface of some of the older lichen-tainted headstones.

Near the center of the cemetery stood one large monument. It was an angel with its arms outstretched and its eyes gazing upward towards the heavens. Its epitaph was dated 1874 with the name of Routh, my grandmother's ancestors. Altogether, the gothic atmosphere gave the grounds an aura of serenity and silent strength. It was an appropriate place of rest for my grandfather.

It was January, so the wind was brisk and chilled. The sky was deep blue and cloudless; the sunrays penetrated through the maze of oak branches, highlighting the barren whiteness of the field of gravestones. As with previous trips to the cemetery for the funerals of less immediate relatives, the first thing that my eyes

turned to on this day was the angel. It stood as resolute as usual, like a watchman guarding its domain. I noticed that its marble had recently been washed, and it now shone a brilliant ashen. Its stone-feathered wings towered above its body, the subtlety of the marble contrasting with the shadowy greens of the nearby undergrowth and sapphire of the oak-branch-obscured sky.

The service was short and simple. My father gave a brief eulogy, and we all dropped red roses on the grave. At one point when the proceedings reached their emotional peak, my mother whispered to me, "You know it's okay if you cry, son."

"Yes...I know," I answered, but still, I shed no tears.

Instead, I lowered my head and began to fiddle around with my inside coat pocket, grasping for the harmonica. It was cold like the winter air despite the fact that it had been so close to my body the whole time.

The service ended with a unique experience. My aunt had hired a musician to sit outside the walls of the cemetery and play "Bye, Bye Blackbird" on the banjo, and so we left the gravesite with a serenade of my grandfather's favorite song. At the time, I only wished that I knew how to play it on my harmonica. That way, I could have played along.

The wake was held later that day. It was quite informal and not too overburdened with emotion. We ate the usual pity food, laid out on a big table like a restaurant-style buffet. All the while, we talked about my grand-

father's life, finding true mourning in the loss and bittersweet joy in the memories. Eventually, the day came to an end, and everyone headed home.

That night I sat on the edge of my bed; my room was solely illuminated by the light of a waning moon. I took out the harmonica, and as I saw my reflection in it once again, thoughts began to flow through my head. I wondered how I would be when I grew old and if I would be as a good of a man as Grandfather was.

Then something happened, spontaneous and true. I began to play a song within the solitude of my bedroom. It was "Amazing Grace," and it was not perfect, but it was good enough. The notes sounded with a melancholic fury, augmented by the glimmering of metal in the pale moonlight. Soon after, the tears finally arrived, and I lamented in the emptiness of my own private space. The blues flowed from the harmonica as my heart and soul drifted down a river of sorrow.



Steel Cage

Lora L. Shuppard

An angel with broken wings
A demon with nowhere to look
 except a mirror
At a reflection that shows
 every flaw and facet of a shattered soul
Turning to run again, but fenced in
 nowhere to go, nothing to say
No sound, all silence
 save the staccato beating of a heart
Alone and cold, afraid
 no courage, no tears
Impenetrable as a rock
A will as formidable as a glacier
A tempered steel cage
 that will never let me go.

Angus

To Dust

Joan Richardson

The lonely moonlight dapples your vision
With patches of silver light
Shining.
Whimpering babe,
Lost and alone,
Your mother has flown far away
Chrysanthemums on her grave
Dying,
Her body as still as a stone.

Their wings, the ravens, dark and slow,
To heaven at last shall surely go...
Wandering on trails etched in the sky
Scattered with clouds of memory.

The empty spaces between the stars
Forever deep and vacant,
Calling.
Angel of the sepulchre silences,
How your eyes burn when you cry...
Hanging in the empty sky,
Falling,
How intimate are her eternity kisses.

Your skin so pallid, your embrace
Like feathers softly on my face
Bringing life to this cold, still body
That felt at once...dead.

The Bond of a Child



She left screaming
From the pains of impending birth;
Yet the smile she gave comforted me!

I felt her excitement
Yet I cried out for her not to leave.

Then he returned alone,
A scornful look upon his face;
You must be brave, he said,
So tight was his embrace;
Can't breathe!
"She's gone,"

He whispered to me. I cried;
I'm sorry; I am not so brave!
As we entered that strange place,
Look, she is lying in that box!
So peaceful she seems asleep. Could it be?
An invitation to climb in? Yippee!
Only six, so I understood not
Why they pulled me from her side,
The hands that grabbed me,
The voices that scorned,
Causing rage to build inside
An impenetrable wall, and since,
No more do I cry!

Angus

The Day the Music Died

Jimmy Brown

"Isn't she pretty?" I asked my cousin Krystal, showing her the album cover of Aaliyah's self-titled CD. We sat on the stiff couch in the dimly lit hotel living room area. The other members of our family were asleep in the two bedrooms of the hotel.

"Yeah," my cousin mumbled, flipping through the booklet. "Her eyebrows are really thick and pretty."

"Have you got the CD yet? It's really good."

"Naw. I haven't had the money."

"Well, you better get it. She's supposed to be shooting a video right now for 'Rock the Boat,' you know."

"Yeah, I saw her on TV the other day talking about it. Well, I'm about to go to bed now. Good night."

"Good night."

I went to make a pallet on the floor while Krystal and her two younger sisters prepared the pull-out couch they were going to sleep on. Soon the lamp was turned off, and the lights from the TV screen flickered in the dark. I lay on my back, legs straight, ankles crossed, and hands under my head as I prayed and thought about my day.

My family and I had traveled to Dallas that August 25, 2001, to meet up with other family members and to go shopping. We had spent most of the day in the late summer heat as we

looked around at an outdoor flea market.

"I can't wait to see her new video. I wonder what she is doing right now," I thought as we all walked around together, and one of them pointed out a picture of Aaliyah at one of the vendors.

Afterwards, we went to a mall where Krystal and I separated from the rest of the group. I had to follow along with her to all the women's stores in order for me to be able to go to shops I wanted to go to.

"Aaliyah would wear something like this," I would inform Krystal, who was filing through some clothes while I pointed to a sleeveless shirt. She would stop, turn around to face me, look at the shirt, roll her eyes, and then go back to filing through the clothes.

I lay there on the pallet laughing inside, thinking about what a great time we had and how obsessed I was with Aaliyah.

The next day, I sat in the back seat of my parents' 4-Runner trying to figure out why I was feeling the way I felt. My mom drove, and my stepdad was in the passenger seat. They both listened to CDs and engaged in conversations. My older sister held my infant niece in her lap, and they both

slept. We were returning home from what had started out to be a great getaway weekend. Thoughts checked in and out of my head as I stared out the window at the thick trees lining the interstate. My throat felt as if there were a millstone attached to my Adam's apple. My body was numb. The music playing added to my sadness, which was weird. I had always perked up when music was playing since I acquired an astounding love for it. I thought back to where it all began.

* * *

Ever since I was a little boy, I had enjoyed the sound of music. The harmony, the lyrics, and the sounds of the different instruments intertwined were, well, like music to my ears. Music to me was like dope to a drug addict. I was addicted. Music had always brought me closer to my family and bandaged me when reality wounded me.

I remember as a child being obsessed with Michael Jackson. Sporting a glistening gheri curl on my four-year-old head and a pleather red jacket similar to Jackson's in his "Thriller" video on top of my T-shirt and Scooby-Doo underoos, I used to run around the house imitating the legendary pop star when he was the best.

"You know I'm bad, I'm bad. You know it. Schomon. Duh-duh-duh-duh. Who's bad?"

"He-hee," I shrieked as I either twirled in a circle, grabbed my unmentionables, or walked backwards (which was my moonwalk) pretending to be Michael.

I would study his videos whenever they were on and sit motionless whenever his music was being played. I was in awe of how someone could be

so talented. I considered it a treat and looked forward to my mom playing his cassette tapes from the entertainment center in the living room. I would quietly sit on the sofa, as if in a daze, observing all the different notes and melodies blasting from the speaker. I was hardly affected by my mom's occasional "heey!" as she danced in the living room snapping her fingers, unless she did her funny dance, which caused me to laugh.

"Come dance with me, Boobie," would also awaken me from the trance that the music had put me in. Then, we would dance and laugh together until the tape was finished.

My obsession with Michael Jackson ended a bit later when his child molestation scandal began. But even then, my love for music lived on. I enjoyed listening to older music from my parents' collection. I was fascinated by the music of Marvin Gaye, The Isley Brothers, and Al Green that I had so often heard my parents play. It must have boggled their minds when they heard and saw their eight-year-old son singing and dancing to the lyrics of "Sexual Healing."

Several times they had walked into my bedroom finding me with a pair of headphones on, which were plugged into the radio. My eyes would be shut as I mimicked the gestures of singers I had seen in a recording booth. I would lip-synch to the music from the headphones into my imaginary microphone.

For a moment, I would really imagine myself as being a singer recording a song until my parents intervened.

"You're recording a song again, huh?" one of them would say, frightening and bringing me back to reality.

After stopping the tape, pulling down the headphones, and turning around, I would answer my parents while being ashamed for getting caught.

"Yeah," I would reply smiling.

After they left, I would return to the imaginary recording session.

As I gain consciousness after being lost in my thoughts, I tried to remember why I was suffering from the pangs of grief. I was quickly reminded of why. Then trying to forget the source of the pain, I lapsed back into my thoughts.

My pretend recording sessions continued, and my love for music grew over the years. My early passion for music was just puppy love compared to the romance that was kindled in 1994. I had just turned ten years old, and summer was approaching. My mom and I were riding to the store, and a song played that was unique compared to the others.

"What do you want to eat tonight, Boobie?"

"I don't know. I feel like..."

My sentence was interrupted as I observed what was playing through the speakers.

"And here's a new one called 'Back and Forth' by soon-to-be star Aaliyah," the DJ said.

I've never heard anything like this before. An angelic, soft voice gently flowing over rough, thumping beats made my acquaintance. That same feeling of amazement I used to feel when listening to Michael Jackson's music took over.

Soon after, I would once again hit my imaginary recording studio singing the dance tune as the single I

borrowed from my older sister, played on the radio.

That single was the only access I had to Aaliyah's music besides the radio. Being a ten-year-old kid, I was unable to buy her seventeen dollar debut CD. Nor did we have cable, which would have given me the luxury of watching her videos and interviews. So every time her music was played on the radio, I would put off everything. I'd stand where ever I was as if I were in a trance, taking in every note. Her music would overcome me. I would feel a tingling sensation as the melody and harmony saturated me. My mind would go blank. Then, after the songs were finished, I'd snap back into reality.

A couple of years later when her second album was released, my adoration had turned into obsession. By that time, we finally got cable, and my fascination for her grew as I lifelessly sat in front of the television screen when her videos were on. I studied her every movement as the video played. I would also record them sometimes and force my mom to sit down and watch them with me.

"Momma, come and watch Aaliyah's new video with me," I insisted one day.

She sluggishly plopped herself on the couch, showing that she did not enjoy being forced against her will to watch this video. Although I knew she, too, was a fan of Aaliyah, her attitude still gave me a feeling equivalent to hearing nails run down a blackboard. I mean, how can someone possibly not want to watch an Aaliyah video? But I did not let that bother me. The VCR hummed as it rewound the tape, and she slouched on the couch with her elbow on the armrest and her

hand propping up her face.

"Why do you like Aaliyah so much?" she asked as if disgusted, but only to tease me.

"I don't know. There's something that's just different about her," I said as the video started.

"Yo! Turn my music up," Aaliyah commands with her silky black hair covering her left eye in the beginning of her "4-Page Letter" video.

I sat in awe, feeling warm and happy inside as if someone had just given me a million dollars. I was so amazed by her beauty and her mysteriousness. I was astonished by her graceful way of dancing. I thought her talent was something so great and so valuable that anybody would be impressed.

My mom, on the other hand, sat there as if she were mad at the world.

"Can I go now?" she asked, showing her impatience when the video ended. She never really was enthused by videos.

Although Aaliyah's videos may not have brought my mother and me closer together, her music surely did. Countless times, we cleaned the house or yard together while listening to *One in a Million*, which, on several occasions, led to our dance sessions.

"You don't know nothing about this," my mom would say when presenting some outrageous dance from "back in the day."

Her dance moves would come in handy when I performed to various tracks of the CD to an imaginary audience. Sometimes when I was alone, I would pretend that I was a major singer putting on a concert. My bare belly overlapped my baggy sagging pants, and my vision was pretty blurry through my non-prescription sun-

glasses. My performances would take place in the family den. In front of me was the couch, with its many throw pillows, which were the members of my audience. Behind me was the entertainment center with the CD on pause in the stereo.

"Ladies and gentleman, please welcome Jimmy," I would say in my announcer's voice standing in the doorway.

"Aaughhhh," came from my mouth in a loud whisper, imitating screaming fans in a large arena. Afterwards, I 'd step in the space between the couch and entertainment center.

"Are ya'll ready to party?" I would ask the fans while holding a TV remote control to my mouth, which was my microphone.

"Aaughhhh," was the reply I made to myself.

From there, I would push "play" on the stereo and lip-synch the songs from the album and do my best to imitate her dance moves, in a masculine way, of course. Then I would intertwine my mom's dances with mine.

After the CD was finished, I'd walk alongside the couch and tap the pillows with my hands as if I were touching the hands of adoring fans who wanted to touch a superstar.

"Ya'll have been great. Thank you. God Bless!"

* * *

"Jimmy. Jimmy!" my mom called to get my attention.

"Huh?" I answered in bewilderment.

"Do you want something from here?" she asked.

We were stopped at a convenience store somewhere alongside the interstate in Texas.

"Naw. That's okay," I sighed pitifully and leaned back in the seat and closed my eyes. I thought that if I could sleep, my pain would go away. But I could not, because my thoughts continued to wander.

It had been five years since Aaliyah released an LP. That meant five years of sitting by the radio hoping to hear a new song of hers, watching TRL religiously in hopes of hearing some news about her, and traveling to the music shops to flip through the CDs in her section to see if somehow she had put out a new one without it being known. I knew she hadn't, but I had to go and check anyway.

"How could this be?" the thought tortures me as I tried to find some reasonable explanation to console myself. *"How could I prosper in a dream one moment and be dreading life in a nightmare the next?"*

I was awakened earlier that morning annoyed at the sounds of pots and pans violently clanging together as my mother searched through them in the kitchenette next to where my cousins and I slept. I didn't know why she searched through them, for we planned to eat out that morning. After her performance with the cooking instruments ended, I was forced to hear the sounds similar to that of a person with a case of post-nasal drip come from the coffee pot. Too cold and respectful to get up from the pallet and ask her to quiet down, I turned my back to the noise and covered my head with the blanket with force to let her know I did not appreciate the concert she was putting on.

"Jimmy, Krystal, ya'll get up," my mom said in a cheerful voice, which only added to my agitation.

After we got up and sluggishly stumbled around, being drunk with sleepiness, we made up our sleeping areas. We then took turns using either of the two bathrooms to get dressed and brush our teeth. Up until that point, we were pretty quiet because we did not want our morning breath mixing with the air.

After gathering our things, we all piled into the SUV to go to breakfast. The bright sun crept higher and higher in the pink sky that warm, pleasant morning. The roads were clear of the heavy traffic that is typical of Dallas. The ride to Denny's was a quiet one, except for when my older cousin Candace spoke.

"Turn here. Make a right at the red light," Candace, a Dallas native, commanded from the backseat to my stepfather, who drove the truck. Eventually, we arrived at Denny's, which was semi-filled with big, hairy-faced men clad in plaid garments and trucker caps and families in their Sunday clothes. After a waitress pulled tables together so that my large entourage could be seated together, we sat down and ordered. Most of us ordered The Grand Slam, costing only \$2.99, since we were broke from all the spending we did the day before.

After eating, we got in the truck and headed back to my Aunt Bob's house. After a quick twenty-minute ride, we arrived at the house. There awaiting us were Bob and my Aunt Nita. We filled the comfortable-sized living room like sardines in a can. Elbows were touching elbows as parts of my family sat on the love seat and couch.

Our voices trampled over each others' as we who were younger talked together while the adults spoke

among themselves.

While carrying on a conversation with Krystal, I searched through hair magazines, which were under the end table next to me, looking for pictures of Aaliyah.

"Look, Momma," I said, holding up a magazine with a picture of Aaliyah in it.

She shook her head and rolled her eyes.

Afterwards, I continued to flip through more magazines as I blocked everything else out. This was until I heard the subject of *Romeo Must Die* come up. My Aunt Nita was telling my mom and Aunt Bob how good it was.

I sat there with joy on the edge of the couch as the adults' conversation continued about the movie.

Five minutes had passed when my Uncle Vic walked into the living room, allowing the burglar-bar-decorated door to crash behind him.

"Hey, Vic," we all simultaneously greeted him.

"Hey, ya'll. Aaliyah was killed," he nonchalantly informed us.

Immediately, panicked inquiries aimed at my uncle flew from all across the room, while I sat still with a frowning face. My heart was beating like a dribbling basketball, trying to put my psyche around that concept. At once, her performance on the Jay Leno show played in my mind. Pressure surrounded my head as if I were being clutched to a big person's chest and smothered by it.

"How she die?" someone asked Vic.

"In a plane crash. I just heard it on the radio."

My mom stared at me with sympathetic eyes to see how I was

responding. I looked at her with a brief, no-teeth smile to ensure her that I was okay. All attention fell on me.

"Are you alright, Jimmy?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," I struggled to say without breaking down.

As conversations lingered on, I sat there trying to figure out how someone so gorgeous, so sophisticated, so gifted, someone who was not like other classless pop ingénues such as Britney, Christina, or Beyoncé, could die. The question haunted me whenever my mind was not occupied with happier thoughts of my love for music.

Music died that Sunday morning. I hardly ever get excited any more with the stuff that plays on the radio now. There are no longer times where I put on fake performances, or times when my mom and I listen and dance to music together. Everything that music brought forth for me was torn down that day.



Angus

Damn I Am Shamarra G. Williams

Damn I am confused at the simplest things, the unrealistic dreams it seems plague our self-esteem.

I believe that people will try to kill your dreams. The means to get what you need lie in someone else's hands, my people take a stand on the soil of the American land.

I stand confused at black people not getting along because you are lighter or taller and someone thinks you don't belong. That same sad-ass song that, "The man is trying to hold us down," when we won't even help our own neighbor off the ground.

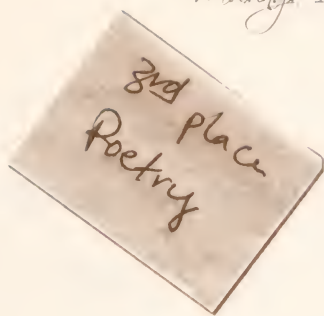
The sound barrier between our souls, the whole world's going to pay the toll to get to the other side, no matter how rough the ride, you are expected to act civilized and reside in a state of peace. But so many people reside in the streets and think that they were given the short end of the stick, when everybody ain't got shit. So why you mad at this, you should be mad at that, and cut yo' brother some slack but everybody says fuck that cause I come first, and I'll thirst after flesh as long as someone else takes care of the rest.

We wonder why black people can't trust each other, it's because we can't trust ourselves to do what is right, while we stand and fight for justice from the police, we pollute our communities by selling crack on the streets. It's getting deep in here and I can't lie because I am guilty with a capital Y but I won't try to sit and reconcile the differences. Our brains got left and right hemispheres creating two ways to get you nearer to your dreams, it seems change has got to come because we are not at the end, we have just begun to realize to see the beauty in life. With a past so confusing I don't have to think twice.

I want reparation for my struggles, I want litigations for my troubles, I want situations that don't force our brothers to hustle, we need emancipation from these chains and recuperation without restraints. I need peace within my decisions and Lord guide us through day and night on our missions. I admire and listen to the souls of our past and pray for our souls a peace that will ever last.

Elle and Vogue

A. Pierce



I want it—
Thin skin,
Stretched taut as catgut against jutting hipbones
Knees and elbows
Knobs of bone

But I walk aware
Of the abrasions of skin
Boisterous thighs, brushing violently past
Road rash

I've tried it all:
Light-up little pig in the freezer,
Screams at the light
Spells and diets
Grapefruits and dry tuna
No sugar
No meat
Sucked down prune juice
Enemas in the evening.

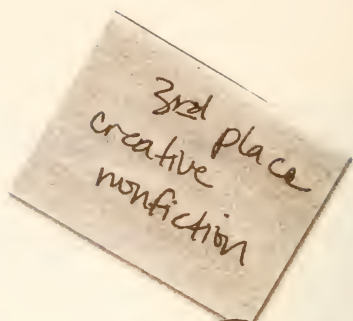
Nothing removes the waste.

I saw a show once,
TV glowing in the dark
About a woman, stinking,
So mad with fat
That her food talked to her.
The banana screeched and writhed as she
peeled him
Died when she bit off the top
And the pear pleaded,
"Don't, please, Don't!"
But she couldn't stop
So she sewed her lips shut
Red thread jailing pink tongue,
The silver glint of needle
Poking crudely through her face.
I walk aware
Stinking rolls of flesh
Slippery with sweat
Fat tumbling together
Roll after roll
Red lines, creases where the skin stops
And I'm thinking I might cut it off,
The bulk of me.



Historical Tales of the Voodoo Queen: Marie Laveau, Practitioner to Priestess

By: Amanda Robinson



Initiation

Marie quickened her pace through the dark cobblestone streets, wishing the moon had chosen another night to hide away her light. Thankfully, a young white lad was accompanying her. They were almost through the French Quarter, and the forsaken brick lot would soon be in sight. They would be safe there, if they could avoid the police. The police officer roamed about at night, hoping to find exotic young Creoles like Marie without a pass. Even though Marie was a free woman of color, she still had to wear a handkerchief around her head, stating to all that Negro blood coursed through her veins, and without a pass, the police could capture and sell her. The young man scurrying to keep up would vouch for her should they be spotted, but the police might not believe him, so she thought it best to avoid the police altogether.

"Hurry, master. The police will see us. They cannot see us tonight," whispered Marie. Tonight was important. It was her transformation. Tonight, an ancient practitioner would endow her with the power of the ancient practitioners. Although Marie was a devout Catholic, she had practiced voodoo for as long as she could remember. Her

Haitian ancestors had passed down the common rites and rituals in her family for generations. Still, Marie needed a mentor. She needed someone to reveal the ancient secrets of possession and worship her family had forgotten or left out over the years. Sanite Dede, the reigning voodoo queen, had accepted Marie as an apprentice, and tonight she would perform Marie's initiation, but not if Marie were late, or worse, absent.

In the distance, Marie heard the familiar sound of drums. Their methodic beat comforted her, and she knew the building was close. She moved faster now through the shadows until she felt the brick building beneath her fingers, then traced the outline of the wall searching for an entry. Relief filled her when she felt a knob. She knew this ritual well. Marie knocked, three smacks with her fist, trying to make herself heard over the pounding drumbeats. Sanite Dede opened the door, only partially, to allow a miniscule amount of light to escape. Her aged Creole skin wrinkled in disappointment, "You are late. There are four others to bless tonight besides you." Marie tucked her head in reverence. "Come quickly," ordered Sanite Dede. Hastily, Marie and the young master crossed the threshold to begin the ceremony.

They entered a brick shed, about twenty by forty feet, with dirt floors. Sconces filled the room, providing only dim light. The women all wore the customary madras handkerchiefs, tied with seven artistic points. However, tonight the women wore white handkerchiefs over their madras. There were at least sixty people, mostly Creole men and women like Marie, but eight whites: six men and two women. Marie placed the young master with the white people to observe the ceremony. Marie, along with the other four voodoo initiates, wore white dresses. They formed a semi-circle facing Sanite Dede at one end of the shed, and everyone else stood behind them. Many were playing homemade tambourines, banjos, and gourd rattlers, but the drums were overpowering, veraciously thumping *bum, bum...bum, bum, bum*.

Behind Sanite Dede were two stone altars reaching as high as a man's shoulders, layered with bright white sheets and illuminated by candles placed erratically on the altars. Ritual tools lay atop each one: an ebony doll, a necklace made from the spine of a snake, and a fang sheathed in silver. A rectangular table rested between the altars, and two dead black cats lay on each side of the table. On the center of the table sat a wicker basket and a calabash that was full of water blessed by Zozo, Sanite Dede's assistant for the ceremony. His skin resembled the calabash, aged and withered, and he was Creole, like most of the people at the ceremony. Zozo was also a voodoo priest and a snake charmer.

Zozo handed Sanite Dede the calabash, and she began sprinkling each of the petitioners in front of her with

the water in time and tune with the drums, which began to beat more furiously. Marie knew the drums were calling the spirits, calling them to join and be one with her, with the people in the shed. Her body began to move rhythmically with the beat. Sanite Dede stepped aside and Zozo came to stand in front of the four women. From the table behind him, he took the wicker basket and placed it on the floor, removing the lid and setting it aside. Reaching down into the basket, Zozo withdrew a voluminous snake with entrancing eyes. Its skin glistened in the candlelight. He held the snake over the heads of the women one at a time, whispering, "Come, Voodoo, Come." The chant was an open invitation.

As the spirit came, it flooded Marie with ecstasy, washing over her in waves, undiluted and pure. She felt as if her clothing were suffocating and restraining her. She wanted to be free, needed it. She tore the white handkerchief from her forehead, wanting to rid herself of the hated symbol. She was no longer an initiate, no longer a petitioner. Now, she was a priestess. She decided a priestess should be one with the spirit, without bindings to an earthly plane, so Marie pulled at the ties of the white dress. She continued, dancing and pulling, until she swayed nude, like a snake, slithering within a circle, lost in a spirit possessed trance and dance.

Pact with the Devil

Father Antonio stepped off the boat and felt relieved to be on familiar ground. This was his second trip to New Orleans. He was actually surprised at the appointment, considering his recent

disputes with the Catholic Church. Father Antonio thought he was too old to be of any real use, but he accepted the position as Chaplain of St. Louis because it was his duty. He had promised to serve God and the Catholic Church. Even though he felt the two were not always working toward the same goal of peace and love for this world. As he walked on, he noticed the drunks passed out near the boats, and spotted a man dragging a young woman into an alley. His sandaled feet quickly paced through the French Quarter as the brown monastic robe swished around his body. He had a sudden longing to be secure within the walls of St. Louis again.

As he approached the cathedral, the Spanish architecture took him off guard. The building had changed a great deal. When he was last here, St. Louis was a beautiful French monument, crediting the city's Creole heritage, standing since 1727, but the fire in 1788 had decimated St. Louis, along with nearly nine hundred other buildings surrounding it. The Spanish had finished rebuilding the St. Louis in 1794, leaving their impression for generations to come. He stared at it, mesmerized by the stained glass windows portraying the celestial wonders that he adored.

However, time for reminiscing would come later. Now, he had work to do. The popularity of the Catholic Church had been waning for some years in New Orleans because of the restrictions placed on the parishioners. People of color, diverse denominations, mixed racial marriages, and immigrants could not participate in sacraments or mass, but Father Antonio intended to change all

that. First, St. Louis needed funds, and to get funds it needed parishioners.

His recent disputes with the ecclesiastical authorities had not left him in their good graces, so he was not likely to receive much assistance from them. Their views did not mesh with his because he wanted freedom for all men and women, especially the slaves. In his mind, single mothers needed assistance instead of persecuted, and that all races had the right to intermarry and be baptized into the Catholic faith, without prejudice. Unfortunately, not all his brothers in the faith shared these beliefs.

The next morning, Father Antoine surveyed the members at mass. His eyes caught one of the most exotic creatures God had ever made. She was a Creole woman of color, but she wore a dark purple madras bandanna around her head, tied in seven points, attractively turned upward. Slaves traditionally wore the madras, but this woman was wearing gold hoop earrings, gold bracelets, and her attire was anything but the traditional slave garb. He watched as the woman left the sanctuary and then followed her out to the concrete steps in front of the church.

From a distance, he observed her kneeling on the steps. She placed something in her mouth, but he could not quite make out what. Father Antoine settled himself safely out of sight behind a column. For three hours, the young woman knelt and seemed to be praying. Occasionally, as men and women passed through the doors, Father Antoine introduced himself, using the time to meet and greet the members of St. Louis. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw

the young woman stand, turn, and walk down the steps, bumping against an elderly man heading into the cathedral.

Intrigued, Father Antoine went back inside St. Louis, following the old man who made his way to the last pew in the sanctuary and sat down. Father Antoine politely introduced himself and sat down to have a talk with the elderly man.

"My son, did you recognize that young woman who bumped into you just outside?" Father Antoine asked curiously.

The old man had kind eyes and wrinkled his forehead when he answered, "Yes, Father, she is Mademoiselle Marie Laveau, a high priestess."

"Of voodoo?" asked Father Antoine, raising his eyebrows.

The old man's eyes bulged as he answered, "Yes, she leads the dances at Congo Square. I have seen her hypnotize the police officers who try to keep us from worshipping in the Square on Sundays. She made the policemen get down on all fours and bark like dogs."

Stunned, Father Antoine asked, "If she is a voodoo priestess, why was she praying here?"

"Madame Marie believes in one God. She believes when she prays to the spirits, she is praying to all. Today she prayed for a young man who is on trial for rape."

Father Antoine thanked him and made his way back to the door. His next stop was the courthouse.

He watched Marie enter the courthouse from the rear entrance, and he surreptitiously slipped into the building after her. She was making her way across the room toward the judge's chair. They were both early, and the room was near-

ly empty. He watched her kneel down as she had earlier and wondered if she was going to pray again. Instead, she bent down and spit. "My God," he wondered, "Has she had something in her mouth this entire time?" He realized it was the same something she had put in her mouth back at the church. He eased closer, trying to make out what it was. Again, she spit something underneath the judge's chair. Shocked, Father Antoine continued to creep toward her, and she spit a third time. This time he was close enough to see. It was a green, jalapeno pepper.

Before he could ask her about the peppers, the room began to fill with people. He quickly found a seat in the back of the room. Marie sat closer to the front on the left, which was the side of the defendant. The defendant was a young man in his mid-thirties. He was rather tall, and lean, but dressed as if he was from a wealthy family. Father Antoine figured the older man directly behind the younger one was his father because they kept whispering to the lawyer.

Finally, the judge entered and court was in session. From what Father Antoine could make out, the defendant was accused of raping a young woman. The prosecution was making an excellent case. They had testimonies from witnesses that placed the young man with the victim on the night of the incident, and the victim had testified. Throughout the trial, Father Antoine watched Marie glare at the prosecutor. Then, when the lawyer was giving his final speech, trying to convince the jury members of the young man's guilt, Marie shook a small velvet pouch in the prosecutor's direction. The jury members had watched

Marie throughout the trial, and they definitely noticed the *gris-gris* pouch.

Soon enough, the jury left the room for deliberations, and the judge declared a recess. Father Antoine thought he would seize the opportunity to introduce himself to Marie, but he could not get close enough. People swarmed her. She seemed to know everybody in the room. So, he settled back in his seat to await the jury's return. He watched Marie interact with the people. They seemed to approach her with awe and respect, keeping their facing turned down and whispering in hushed tones. She had a smile for each one of them, especially the young man on trial and his father. They kept watching her, as if they were expecting something from her. Finally, the judge and jury returned to the courtroom, and someone announced that court was back in session.

"Has the jury reached a verdict?" asked the judge.

The representative of the jury stood and answered, "We have your honor."

"Would the jury please read the verdict?"

"We the jury, find the defendant not guilty."

Father Antoine sat shocked in the back of the courtroom. Just like that, court was over. The jury acquitted the defendant, despite the strong evidence against the young man. He watched Marie exchange a piece of paper with the young man's father and assumed it was a payment of some sort. Father Antoine had lived long enough to know a good thing when he saw it, and he knew Madame Marie was just the hook St. Louis needed. She obviously had some sort of political power in the town. He

simply could not accept that voodoo *gris-gris* was responsible for the young man's acquittal. Whatever the case, Madame Marie was obviously well known, and he intended to utilize her skill for the good of St. Louis.

The next morning, Father Antoine followed Madame Marie to the doorsteps of the church and called out to her, "Madame Marie. Might I have a word with you?"

"Of course, Father Antoine is it?" Marie inquired, although she already knew who he was.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I was wondering what you were doing at court yesterday?" Father Antoine's curiosity was piqued, and he had to know.

"Yesterday," she replied smiling sweetly, "I was completing a bargain. I assisted a young man with an acquittal, and his father rewarded me with a house."

"I see." He replied. Father Antoine was glad Madame Marie liked bargains, because he intended to make one with her. "Mademoiselle, might I persuade you to invite some of your acquaintances to come with you to mass on occasion."

"Father Antoine, are you suggesting a bargain?" Marie asked, eyeing him coyly.

Father Antoine was mesmerized by the enchanting Creole standing in front of him. He wondered if she truly had some magical ability because she was reading his mind.

"You could perform the sacraments of marriage, baptism, and Holy Communion for my people," Marie suggested. Her people had long believed in the duality of voodoo and Catholicism.

They needed someone to sanction marriages that crossed racial lines, baptize children born out of wedlock, and offer Communion without prejudice.

"Yes, Yes, I could do that, and you could bring them, bring them all. I want the benches of St. Louis to be packed full." Father Antoine entreated. His heart was racing. Part of him worried that the church might excommunicate him. They related voodoo with satanic worship, but Father Antoine knew this was the deal of a lifetime. Smiling sheepishly at each other and to themselves, they agreed and made a pact, right there on the doorsteps of St. Louis Cathedral. Marie smiled because she had won coexistence between her people and the church. Father Antoine smiled because he had made a pact with the devil that was going to revive St. Louis.

Dancing in the Spirit

For Marie Laveau, Sunday afternoon was a time to celebrate her Haitian heritage. The different African nationalities gathered at Congo Square, on the backside of the French Quarter, to perform their ritual dances. The dances held at Congo Square were traditional, and they were almost as old as the city of New Orleans. Today, the Square held over one thousand participants and onlookers, mostly slaves gathered there to express themselves and their heritage, but also many whites were there to admire or mock the spiritual dances.

Many slave owners feared a slave rebellion, and the mass gatherings only increased their fear. So, they placed black iron fencing around the square, with four gates in the center of each side: north, south, east, and west. Police officers were placed at each entry to guard

the dancers and provide containment in case of a revolt, but they never frightened Marie. She just walked past them, staring them down and daring them to approach her.

Marie always performed the first dance alone. As the reigning queen of voodoo, Marie danced the *Calinda*, one of the many dances used to call forth the spirits that would join them as they worshipped. At the edge of the Square, Marie slipped off her shoes and began walking to the center of the Square. She had long since grown accustomed to people watching her as she moved. She carried herself with a theatrical appearance, wearing gypsy garb, an abundance of gold jewelry, and the traditional madras, even though she was not a slave. She carried with her an alabaster box, given to her by a Haitian priest.

When she reached the center where the four corners of the Square crisscrossed, Marie knelt down and placed the box by her bare feet. She made a fist and gently rapped three times on the compressed dirt. Three taps echoed through the Square. Then, from the box, Marie withdrew *Zombie*, a snake, reaching nearly twenty feet in length. As she withdrew him, the drums began beating in the background. The drums were handmade from animal skins and the jawbones of animals, many of them between two and eight feet in length. The crowd began to chant with the drums—*Dance Calinda, bum, bum, Dance Calinda, bum, bum.*

Marie moved her body, slowly, gracefully, as she allowed *Zombie* to coil around her body. She begged of the snake, "Come, great serpent spirit. Join us." The movement started in her feet.

Each heel lifted and then retreated as the toes came up, but her feet never left the ground. The result was a rocking motion that moved like a wave, up her legs, to her hips, shoulders, and arms, until even her fingertips succumbed to the gentle swaying. Marie contained the dance within a small circle, so that she never left the intersection at the center of the Square.

When the next dance began, the women joined Marie. Many nationalities danced together within circles just a few feet in diameter. As they danced, many of the women loosened their garments or discarded their clothes completely, and the men joined them. To the spectators, it appeared that pandemonium had been unleashed upon the crowd, but to the participants, the spirit came and possessed them while they danced. Some spoke in tongues. Others danced until

they foamed at the mouth and had to be dragged out of the square by their limbs. Still, the dances continued until the predawn hours.

Still invigorated, Marie drifted to the north gate entrance. She looked behind her at the different nationalities, coming together to worship in peace and harmony. For years, she had used her power to unite the community. She had made great gains—the Catholic Church accepted them, slaves and free people had come together. Then her gaze fell on a white man. He was pointing and laughing at one group of dancers. There was still so much discord, so much division. She wondered why people could not lay aside their differences and see what she saw. The people who stood before her were not white, black, Indian, French, or Spanish. They were Creoles.



Tickets to a Silent Concert

Penball & Frederind

Boston rained in
Greenville snowed in
Cancelled flights to what could have been.
Ticket holder to a plain 'ole life
Stewardess for flight Pan Am—
Two abortions, but who gives a damn?
Going to the concert our time forgot
Seeing our future in a dark candle & sleepless night
Backstage pass
Ain't life a blast
But underneath it all is emptiness.

Angels

Untitled

David Hoopigarnes

My heart...
is so cold...so empty.
Broken, and busted.
Shattered into a million pieces,
impossible...
for me to put back together
again.
Even with help.
That is, if I could find it.
A possibility that seems so...

...distant...

...as though it is...

...a thousand miles...

...from my reach.

Yet, it is supposedly so close.
Somewhere, I'm stuck

—between those two places—
in a horrible limbo...
of hope...and despair.

The crumbling remains of my heart...
slowly sift between my fingers...
as this vile bitterness...
at the back of my throat...
wells into my mouth, and chokes me...
causing tears of pure, hot anger...
to roll down my cheeks...
and splash...unheeded...
onto the nothingness...

that is steadily growing around me.
It consumes my senses—
consuming, until the void swallows me...
into the center of my darkest pain...

...forever.

Because,

...I am...

...so...

...very...

alone.

Loneliness

Kyle A. Carter

I feel it again, that sinking sensation,
Like I'm being sucked to the ocean floor.
I see myself clawing, grabbing, clutching, searching
For that hand in the darkness to pull me to safety.
But I find myself lying there on my floor helpless and alone;
Waiting, expecting, wanting the worst to come.
But it never does.
Only the realization that I am alone in this ocean of humanity,
Fighting the currents of civilization to stay afloat.

And then I start to panic as the flood closes in around me.
My lungs grow tight, as in childhood when I couldn't breathe—
Deep troubled gasps in a hospital bed.
My chest rising and falling to the rhythm of my wheezing.
Fear grabs me, holds me tight in place,
Puts in front of me the horrifying truth:
Not knowing if I will be able to take my next breath.

And I get frantic reaching out for something firm.
Something to hold onto, anything to pull myself from these depths,
But I keep getting sucked down, drawn away from everyone.
I've tried so hard to find someone who feels like me
Who hurts like me, who understands the pain I feel.
But there never is anyone.
Just an ocean full of faces, and I am resigned
Like a shipwreck victim, to drown alone in this ocean full of people.

Angus

The Powers That Be

Amy Beth Mensch

1st place
Creative
nonfiction

Kobby experienced overwhelming sadness in September of 1995 upon learning of his grandfather's death. He had been completely unsuspecting when he heard the news, and his grief was so extreme that he found himself unable to cry in mourning of the immense loss. The temperature that day had been a pleasant 70°—plus or minus a few degrees—common to the mountainous coastal region of Western Africa. He had been enjoying his freedom and sense of accomplishment at completing high school the previous May. Although he was twenty years old, he was the normal age for finishing school in Ghana, and he was very lucky to have been able to attend at all. Boarding school had been expensive, but he had completed it successfully and was able to begin working at his mother's shop. His family finally considered him a man.

His grandfather, Kwasi Yirenkwi, had served as a prince in his local village of Amonokrom since the time his father had been king. Kwasi had been honored as the "king of the princes" by the king who followed in his father's footsteps, as Kwasi and his brothers had declined the position for reasons

unknown to Kobby. He knew that a long period of mourning and preparation would soon commence in honor of his 85-year-old royal grandfather. Everyone who knew or followed Kwasi immediately began dressing in black in his memory, and they moved him to the family compound that had been passed down to Kwasi and his siblings. Because no one actually lived in the home, it was ideal for family gatherings and events such as wakes and funerals. After being embalmed, Kobby's grandfather's body remained at the family home until January of 1996, once all of the funeral preparations had been made.

As the planning was completed and the day of the funeral approached, Kobby and his family and neighbors rented a dark, red, Italian-made van and two large beat-up old buses to make the nearly two-hour journey on the sparse, two-lane highway from their homes in Dansoman and Abiriw to their family's ancestral hometown, Amonokrom, where Kwasi would be buried. Kobby and the other males dressed in uniform black embroidered shirts and black shorts and set out on their journey. Kobby looked up to his

older cousin, George, so he rode in the van with him and decided to remain relatively nearby him hoping to benefit from his experience.

It had been at least ten years since the first (and only other) time Kobby had gone to the family compound. His great-grandmother had passed away at 120 years of age. He had been too young to understand much about what was going on as a child, but he knew that the role he would be expected to fill at his grandfather's funeral would be drastically different from anything he had ever experienced. As he endured the long voyage to the gathering, he thought back to what his mother had told him before the journey began. "Because of the rituals that will be done over there," his mother had solidly stated, "and because we are Christian, and I do not believe in those rituals, I would like it if you do not go when they bury him and witness what they will be doing."

He had no intentions to be a part of the burial rituals even before she mentioned it. The idea of going into any graveyard at night terrified him, but he knew the royals had an even more isolated and foreboding final resting place. "I would also not like to go," he had responded. He had heard stories of what would take place, and the strong influences of black magic hung in the air like a thick, brooding thundercloud. He had high regards for his grandfather, and he respected his family and their beliefs immensely, but he wanted no direct part in what he could only imagine would be the most frightening thing he could ever witness.

When the caravan finally arrived,

Kobby only vaguely recalled the sizeable cinder-block home. He remembered sitting under the large tent within the compound at the center of the house and trying to sneak from wing to wing until his mother cut daggers through him with her eyes. He had sat quietly the remainder of the time, but he remembered little else.

They promptly began moving the goats, chickens, ducks, and other livestock from the central compound into the pens on the outer perimeter of the grounds. The earthy ground had to be swept clean of feces and animal feed before the tent could be positioned. There was no grass inside the compound, only cool, dry dust. Outside the compound, there were not cement sidewalks but traffic-worn earthen paths amongst coarse, green grass.

He and the other males wore their wake attire all that Thursday and Friday. Because he was a prince, Kwasi laid in state two full days to show proper respect to his memory. The grounds and house stayed full of guests and well-wishers throughout the proceedings. Kobby watched his grandmother sit the whole time in her traditional African black dress. She and the other women wore black, red, or dark brown wrap-around skirts called *slits* made from long pieces of material fastened with drawstrings. Their tops, called *kebas*, were made with the same embroidered material as the men's attire. The older women, such as his grandmother, wore all black, but some younger women would wear red or dark brown, and their kebas could be wrapped around and sewn in many different styles;

most also wore scarves covering their hair out of respect. Kobby silently observed as his grandmother sat and cried with her hair covered by a black scarf. He did not attempt to comfort her because he could never begin to know how.

Everyone dressed in their formal African funeral attire on Saturday; that was the day Kwasi was to be buried. The women wore the same types of clothes throughout the entire process, but everyone was fresh and crisp for the day of the actual funeral. Kobby felt grave and serious in his traditional black African wrap; he thought it resembled the robes worn by the Roman emperors. The women continued to serve guests and family chilled bottles of alcohol and soft drinks along with African dishes of fish, soup, fufu, banku, kenkey, and rice with stew, while the men visited and went to fetch more food and drinks from the family's supply. This is what they had been saving up for the last several months. Kobby noticed the small table set up to accept monetary donations from guests to help with the funeral expenses as he ran to get more beer. People seemed to avoid this area.

Kobby knew that people were accusing his great-uncle of being responsible for his grandfather's death. "His brother has done this to him!" he overheard as he passed a group of people he did not recognize.

"He has been cursed by black magic! It is a curse, I know it!" he heard another whisper ferociously.

"Greed...he wanted to have the wealth of the Cocoa plant..."

It was common for death to be

blamed on curses brought about by black magic. Kobby did not discuss accusations and allegations that a dark force had been involved in the death of his grandfather. He feared these powers, but he feared God more, so he refused to acknowledge or reply to the gossip.

The sounds of the band rhythmically pounding the African melodies on their drums rang out and blended with the squawking of the chickens, bleating of the goats, and chattering and crying of the guests. Anyone who could find a place to sit made their way inside the house to view the body and pay their last respects. A special place of honor was reserved under the tent for the king the day of the funeral, and he came and stayed three hours, surrounded by his royal guards. Kobby's fifteen-year-old brother, Nana, had made himself scarce during the proceedings, but he found Kobby when the king arrived.

"How has the king come here?" Nana asked.

"He has embraced us with his presence because he knew of all that Grandfather has done," Kobby replied.

"Will he go with the procession to the graveyard?"

"No! A live king does not go to the graveyard-- he only goes to the graveyard when he is dead!"

Long after the king had left and it was dark, the elders put Kwasi in his coffin and called in the family members to say their final goodbyes. Kobby looked down at his lifeless grandfather and was still unable to shed a tear. Kwasi was adorned in valuable gold necklaces, rings, and an

array of other jewelry and colorful fabrics. The clock read 11 PM; the band had ceased playing some time before, and gunfire could be heard coming from outside, signaling the approach of the time to take Kwasi into the graveyard. The Royal Guards fired these shots to let people know to clear the path and get out of sight to prepare for the burial.

Kobby had known what to expect because George had prepared him for what was to come during their journey earlier that week.

"Royalty can only be buried late at night, and no one can watch as they are carried away. Only royalty related through a male can go into the graveyard during the burial. Before he is taken away, all of the lights must be turned out along the path to the graveyard, so that no one can watch. The punishment for someone peeping is very serious. They used to kill anyone caught looking, but the rules have been bent a little bit because of civilization and democracy laws. A goat must be taken into the graveyard and slaughtered and cooked. Then the blood and some of the meat must be scattered as an offering so that the spirits will accept the newly dead and pave the way for him to be accepted into the afterlife. Also, local brewed gin must be offered as a libation to call on the gods and the dead and to invoke the spirits and ask for blessing."

George's words rang in Kobby's ears along with the piercing gunshots coming from outside as the elders ushered family members from the room and said there would be no more visi-

tation. Family members remained inside the house while others either went home or gathered in the compound chanting, crying, and praying. Kobby knew the elders were performing some type of ritual in the room with his grandfather, but he did not want to know what. His desire not to participate in the rituals only grew stronger as the funeral progressed and anxiety heightened. He thought he heard the cry of a goat just before the gunfire increased and the lights began to go out. People had been designated to follow the path all the way to the graveyard turning off lights. Everyone knew that he was being taken. Kobby could no longer hear the goat.

Silence surrounded the procession, other than the distant gunfire. Kobby was surrounded by deafening stillness and absolute darkness. No one moved or spoke for thirty minutes, but it seemed like an eternity to Kobby. Only when the gunfire ceased did everyone know that the burial was complete. Lights slowly found their way back on, but people around Kobby were chattering that it had not taken nearly long enough.

They were soon to learn the cause of the expedited burial. While people were beginning to gather their belongings and prepare to settle for the day, Kobby heard one of his uncles exclaim, "Someone has stolen the goat! No one knows what happened! It has disappeared!"

It was decided that the problem would be settled the following day. Kobby and the rest of his family proceeded to the inn where they had been staying, but Kobby did not rest much

on that night.

The following morning Kobby dressed in old, grey sweat pants and a white T-shirt with insignificant lettering; the others also wore casual work clothes because they all knew that more work had to be done at the family compound that day. They did not speak much on the way to the house, and after arriving, Kobby prepared a cup of warm tea with milk and sugar and ate some bread for breakfast. His mind absently wandered as he ate until one of his uncles jovially burst into the room.

"We are going into the graveyard to place a cement slab over Grandfather's grave. You are welcome to come if you like."

Kobby inquired, "What is the purpose of that?"

"It is to prevent looters from robbing the grave."

"Oh, okay." Kobby did not know what he was getting into when he accepted the invitation. He felt as if he were doing his duty by helping with the process, but he began to feel less secure as he followed his uncles and cousins into the graveyard. As he approached the entrance of the dark, unkempt, overgrown forest, everything became silent, and he felt a sudden chill and apprehension, as if he were standing next to a ghost. He somehow mustered the courage to press onward and followed along with the others.

The path was obviously not well traveled because their clothing continuously snagged on the thorns and bushes as they progressed deeper into the forest. Giant trees loomed over

head, forming a dark canopy over the foliage beneath, but it created a frighteningly morbid environment rather than a beautiful one. Kobby listened attentively and heard birds caw and trees rustle in the unsettling breeze. His eyes darted immediately in the direction of any movement or sound coming from the underbrush, but most often it was only a rabbit or nothing at all.

There were about a dozen men in the group, and easily half of them were drunk. Kobby, however, was exceptionally sober and alert. The men were talking and joking as they made their way to the gravesite, but occasionally, they would all become silent, and a chill would fill the air. There was no winter there, and the temperature remained the same near-70° year round, chilling only slightly and primarily during the night, but it was around 9 AM by that time, so it had already begun to warm up for the day.

They began dumping sand and water into the grave to cover the coffin and fill in the space between the blocked-in walls which had been prepared prior to the burial. Kobby made several trips between the gravesite and the compound to refill his large aluminum pail with sand and water. He did not dawdle on these voyages because he most frequently went alone and wanted to take no chances. The men continued visiting, joking, and reflecting back to the memory of Kwasi and the things he had done. Kobby felt a sense of pride in his grandfather as the others murmured respectfully, "I remember when he helped me out...", "I remember when I

was in trouble appearing before the elders and he supported me ...," "He always gave me food or gave me money when I had none...," and "He was a good man."

Just as they finished placing the heavy cement slab over the top of the grave and covering it with dirt, sand, and brush, Kobby watched as one of his relatives emerged from the path to the gravesite. Kobby knew only that this man was a Fetish Priest, and that he had a reputation for communing with spirits. The priest approached the men and stood next to Kobby.

"There are things that are going to happen here today," he said. Everyone stood watching and listening tentatively. He handed Kobby a bottle of local-brewed gin and passed around cups. Kobby was standing immediately next to the grave when someone else approached with the recovered goat that had mysteriously gone missing the night before. The priest then directed everyone to line up in front of the grave as he prepared to begin offering the libation.

"It is forbidden to spill or throw away anything from your cup once you have taken from it! Doing this brings conflict amongst those buried here! You may only pour from your cup while it is still pure, before it has been tainted by your lips. We will slaughter this goat as an offering and spread the blood and meat all around. Eat all you want, but take none from this place! All of you keep quiet, and stand still because this is very important! What I am going to do will invoke the spirits!"

Kobby's heart pounded and his eyes

widened as the priest directed him to fill the cup with gin. Just as the cup was filled, the priest suddenly jumped back and shouted, "Move out of the way!" All but one of the men, who was very drunk, immediately leapt back from the path to the grave. The priest repeated, "Everyone move out of the way! Clear a path!"

Still the man did not move and, instead, responded in a drunken stupor, "You're crazy! You don't know what you're talking about! Why should I stand in the bushes whilst we've cleared a path to stand in?"

The priest shouted one last time, "MOVE!" But it was too late.

Kobby and the others watched in disbelief as the stubborn man flew into the air and landed with a hard THUD! He attempted to rise up, but he again fell to the ground. He would remain unconscious well into the night.

They all stood there silently and waited. Finally, the Fetish Priest said, "It is done. Now we shall slaughter the goat." Kobby watched as the priest chanted and emptied the cup of gin around the graveyard. They then stood over the goat, grasped it under its chin, lifted back its head, slit its throat with a sharp knife, and spread the blood around as the priest continued chanting. Others were building a campfire to cook the goat, while some were skinning the hide from the flesh and cutting the meat up, into smaller pieces. Kobby maintained his role as a silent spectator during the proceedings. He had never been so scared in his entire life.

After the goat had been boiled over the fire, the meat was placed on a

tray, and nearly everyone, with the exception of Kobby, avariciously seized the meat. The priest offered him gin, but he refused it. "Take some of this meat..." his uncles offered.

But he replied, "No, no...thank you."

He watched as the men ate, drank, chanted, and celebrated over his grandfather's grave.

The priest summoned the men's attention and announced, "I will not tell you what happened here today." He pointed accusingly toward the comatose man sprawled out on the ground and declared with a menacing scowl, "This evening, splash water on his face, and when he wakes, he will tell you what happened to him as a result of his stubbornness. Let this be a lesson to all of you!" And with that, the priest departed the gravesite.

When the rituals concluded, Kobby helped carry the unconscious man back to the compound. After the men had watched the man for several hours and splashed much water on his face, he finally began to slowly awaken from whatever kind of stupor he had been in. Everyone gathered near to him, including those who had not been present at the gravesite.

Kobby listened as the man testified in a voice full of terror, "I saw them! I saw them! Kwasi's father and another king were each holding one of Kwasi's arms, and I saw them walking directly into my path! I was in their way, and they knocked me from their path! Then they knocked me down again and placed Kwasi in his grave! Because the rituals were not performed last night, Kwasi's spirit was

not accepted into the afterlife until today. He was left hanging around at the graveyard until the offerings were made for his acceptance!" The drunken man swore on his life that he would never step one foot into a graveyard again until he was carried there after his own death.

Kobby silently vowed that he too would keep this memory with him forever and avoid ever being a part of another ritual such as the one he had just witnessed. He had not known what to believe, but he knew that he could not believe his eyes or ears. As he returned to the inn, he was uncertain how his mother would react to his participation in the rituals. He had been blind-sided by the circumstances, and had been left not knowing how to escape the perverse scene. His mother knew what had happened before he was able to tell her, however.

"Are you angry with me?" he asked her.

"No, Kobby. I just do not want you to be hurt. I do not want you to feel cast out from our family, but it was unsafe for you to be a part of the ceremonies last night. The royal guards are possessed by spirits during the burial, and their behavior can neither be predicted nor controlled. I want you to be safe. I am not angry; actually, I am glad you could see what has always been a part of our family... and what God has freed us from."

Superglue

David Hoopingarner

"Superglue"

A heart made of glass
 upon a pedestal of brass
 and I give it to you
 hoping you will make it last
 you pick it up,
 shine it up,
 hold it close to view,
 but I guess you saw too many flaws,
~~but~~ because you dropped it soon
 My heart shatters, agonized
 across the ~~blackened~~ blackened, dusty floor
 the pieces sparkling, tinkling
 screaming, bleeding ever more
 and echoing with the sounds
 of loneliness and despair
 you gasp in horror at ~~the~~ ^{the} pieces
 saying "OOPS." -
 like you actually cared
 Kicking the pieces gently
 into one neat little pile,
 you hand me a tube of superglue
 and walk away
 with a satisfied smile

Raining Sadness

Brad Laffitte

With his feet clinging to the mud and rain pouring down the way the sweat was pouring down from his face, Robert thought to himself, "Only seven minutes left. We just need one big play." The quarterback, whose jersey was drenched with mud and stained with blood, hiked the football and faded back to pass. Robert, the running back, ran at an angle to his right and came out of the backfield on a pass pattern. Turning his head towards the quarterback, he saw the ball approaching like a bullet. The football hit him right in the numbers and he tucked it into his muddy green jersey. Turning his head away from the quarterback and towards the end zone, he noticed a defender five yards in front of him and reacted by using a juke move that fooled the opposing player and redirected Robert towards the far side of the field. After running another few yards, he was blindsided by a defensive player and implanted in the mud after a short, six-yard gain. Picking himself up from the mud he thought to himself again, "Just one play to get us back in this."

It was approaching the end of

1966 and Robert Laffitte was ready for the upcoming game. Before the game the locker room was silent and Robert, with his bright, blond hair and slender physique, was in the midst of focusing on the game. Most of the team joined him in quiet concentration, while putting on their pads, jerseys, eye paint, and getting their gear together. Coach Thompson was game planning with his assistant coaches, in one portion of the locker room, and when all the players and coaches were ready, they ran out of the locker room and swarmed towards the large puddle, located inside the stadium. The game was supposed to be played in Buras, but it had rained for over two days and their field was flooded so badly that it was impossible to play a game on it. The game was therefore moved to Harvey, a town just across the river from New Orleans. Running onto the field, Robert saw the big stadium and a field that looked like a marsh. He was also accompanied by the feeling of cold rain and an anxiety to begin the game. The stadium was well lit and the crowd was ready for a hard-hitting football game.

After the pre-game warm-ups, the teams headed to their opposing sidelines. The kickoff welcomed a new downpour of rain, which seemed to drop from the sky about the same time the ball fell upon the receiver. The opposing team's kickoff runner carried the ball eighteen yards before being plummeted into the mud, which left an imprint of where his body lay. Robert watched anxiously as Mansfield's defense prevented Buras from getting a first down and forced them to punt. As he went to the huddle, on Mansfield's side of the fifty-yard line, only a few other players came to the offensive huddle with him, because most of the players played defense and offense.

During the huddle, the quarterback called for a handoff to Robert up the middle. Everyone took their positions and the quarterback examined the defense, while Robert set his feet in the backfield. As he was getting set, he noticed that the mud made it seem as though there were blocks of cement on his feet. Shifting concentration back to the play, the quarterback planted the ball on Robert's slick jersey and Robert rushed for two yards, got his foot stuck too deep into the mud to maneuver, and was hit hard by an opposing linebacker. His fullback helped him up and Mansfield proceeded towards the huddle again. This time the quarterback called a running play to the right. Setting his feet again, Robert noticed the stickiness of the mud and cold rain running down his neck. The quarterback hiked the ball and

handed it to him. His linemen blocked like madmen and his fullback leveled an oncoming defensive back, but a defensive end reached his arm out, grabbed Robert, and slung him into the mud.

Things continued this way for the entire half. Robert would sit on the bench watching his defense make tackle after tackle and then try to help the offense become more effective. The rain seemed to accommodate every up and down that took place. With every bad play it would rain harder and with every good play the rain seemed to diminish. The teams were both scoreless at the end of the first half, but Coach Thompson was optimistic.

"We are doing just fine; we are ahead in first downs. Let's just keep doing what we are doing and an opportunity will present itself." Coach Thompson said.

Robert, his jersey covered with mud, did not let the weather and the scoreless game give him a murky image of the second half. He was a senior and winning this game would lead to the state championship game. He felt a need to overcome the mud and bad weather to give his team a better opportunity to win.

The team came out of the locker room rejuvenated, because they would receive the kickoff. After returning the ball to the twenty-yard line, the ball carrier fumbled and the ball seemed to disappear in the sludge. A dog pile ensued, and the referees found that a Buras player had recovered the ball. The stout

Mansfield defense held Buras and forced them to turn it over on downs. Robert came off the sidelines and approached the huddle. The quarterback called a pass play, which is designed to make the running back block and protect the quarterback. The quarterback hiked the ball and dropped back to pass, while Robert intercepted a defensive lineman who tried to tackle his quarterback. "Oh, crap," he thought as his one-hundred-and-eighty-pound frame tried to block a much larger lineman. By sticking his feet in the mud, trying to get leverage against the bigger opponent, he was able to block the lineman long enough to allow his quarterback to throw the ball. However, the pass was incomplete and the team failed to convert a first down on the next two plays. Robert went back to the sideline and a few players were sent in to join the punting unit. The ball was snapped, and the punter kicked the ball directly into a defender's hands. A scramble began for the ball, but Buras picked it up before Mansfield could recover it. Buras sat in good position, only twenty yards from a touchdown. Mansfield's defense tried to hold them once again, but Buras plowed through the mud and eventually scored on a sixty-yard pass. However, the extra point was no good and left hope for Robert and his team, because one touchdown and extra point would give them the lead.

Time was washed away by the rain until the fourth quarter. With seven minutes remaining in the game

and Mansfield on offense, Robert thought, "Just one big play is all we need." Unfortunately, the sticky mud seemed to be glued to Mansfield's offensive players. The Buras defense held strong, en route to a 6-0 victory. The rain followed Robert and his teammates into the locker room, in the form of tears that only added to their soaked uniforms. For the seniors, it was the last game, and to go out this way was very disappointing. Robert was upset, but held his tears back while observing his teammates' frustrations. Coach Thompson gave the team a final speech: "Ya'll tried the best you could and I just wanted everyone to know that this is the best team I've had. It has been great coaching each and every one of you." After the rain stopped falling from the player's eyes, they got themselves together and left the locker room.

Robert and his friend, both disheartened from the close loss, were picked up by their parents. Their parents tried to cheer them up, but it was a difficult task. Secretly, their parents came up with an idea. They got in their vehicles and drove to New Orleans, and during the drive the rain began to lessen, as did their damp attitudes. As they approached New Orleans, they listened to Otis Redding's "Sitting on the Dock of a Bay." Glancing out the window, Robert saw people walking around on the sidewalks with tie-dyed shirts and Beatles haircuts. Some people were wearing shirts and clothing showing they opposed the Vietnam War. After thirty minutes of driving,

they reached their destination; the "My Oh My" Club. Robert, his friend, and their parents got out of the vehicles and walked towards the door while wondering what kind of club they were going into. They walked through the doors and after they took a few steps, they turned their attention to a stage directly in front of them. "What the hell?" Robert said to his friend laughing, "What is that?" It was a cross-dressing club, and what they saw was a large man dancing in women's clothing. Immediately, Robert and his friend laughed and lightened up, forgetting about their close loss to Buras. Upon leaving the club, Robert, his friend, and their parents noticed that the rain had subsided and they still had a full, fun night ahead of them in New Orleans. Although neither of them would ever play high school football again, there

were many other memories that were not flooded with disappointment.

The Buras–Mansfield game was a semi-final game that took place in 1966. Robert Laffitte is my dad and was a senior in high school at the time. The rain had fallen for over two days and after the game it was named the "Mud Bowl," because of the horrible, muddy field condition. Two newspaper articles, which my dad saved, had varying reports on his statistics. One claimed he had seventeen carries for forty-two yards and did not mention anyone's receptions. In the other article, it claimed he rushed the ball fourteen times for thirty-one yards and had two receptions for fifteen yards. For Coach Thompson, this was his final game as Mansfield's head coach. He had accepted a position at Northwestern State University, to become the head coach of track and field.



Angus

Last Call of the Year

Andi

This holiday we found ourselves apart
in different cities ringing in the year.
I'm sure you wore your blazer that I sent
in packaging marked, "Wear this New Year's Eve."

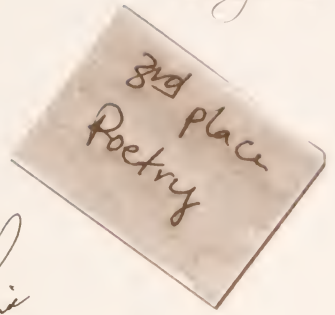
I dressed you for the mark of our fifth Eve
together, though we wouldn't be that night
and waited by my phone I kept so near--
a tiny object in my pocket I
was sure to turn on "loud" so I could hear.

You called apologizing that you could
not be with me that night. Your voice became
so small against the crowd and I hung up.
I quickly typed to race the chanting clock,
a chorus counting down of what was left,

and quickly clicked to send my message through.
The letters "XOXO" raced to you
in mobile form to give you one last wish,
"In absence of me here's a mobile kiss."



If When Love Come,
What a Lovely Fire!
Hannah Lurie



If love be the gasoline of the flesh,
Then strap my bones to a stake and
Purge my soul of such acquired mesh.
I am the prince—forged of bread and beans,

A witch—molding and weaving a furry
Worm goring and branding a cleft
In my boot-heel and a foot full of gout
An angel no more, no less, no doubt

That I may be pricked for moles
In the orange of summer's dying and
Hang from hook and noose and holes
In the twilight of youth's genteel scrying.

And though we may live abreast the world's ending,
Sooner love be ash, that we court flame's impending.

Cloud Juice

TishFelts

Cloud Juice:

It left us
sopping wet
the day that
you didn't
want the
memories
we made,
and a box of
false hope
invaded my
Honda's trunk,
sitting stale
and demure as
your dried cement
heart and my
sullen spirit.

You left us
sopping wet
the day that
Anais Nin spit
on June and
Henry as
soaked novellas
congealed, and
your diamond
pendant sparkled
among pages
that were as
soiled as the
hands that
gave it.

art & literary magazine
Argus



